Leo Strauss

Introduction to Political Philosophy

A course offered in the winter quarter, 1965

The Department of Political Science, The University of Chicago

Edited and with an introduction by Catherine Zuckert

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With assistance from Les Harris and Philip Bretton

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Editor's Introduction

Strauss's Introduction to Political Philosophy

Catherine Zuckert, University of Notre Dame

Leo Strauss taught very few large lecture courses during his eighteen years in the political science department at the University of Chicago. Most of his courses were graduate seminars devoted to the works of specific philosophers.[i] In the winter term of 1965, however, Strauss offered an "Introduction to Political Philosophy" open to undergraduate as well as graduate students. It attracted so many students that the course had to be moved from the medium-sized classrooms in which Strauss usually held his seminars before an audience of 40-50 students to the large, wood-paneled lecture room on the first floor of the Social Sciences Building, room 122.

The transcript of this course reveals some of the reasons Strauss was such a remarkable teacher. He did not merely try whenever possible to find American examples to illustrate points for American students, he also encouraged students to ask questions and displayed a genial sense of humor; the transcript notes repeated instances of laughter. The function of an introductory course is to persuade students to engage in further study, and Strauss's lectures in this course range over the entire history of political philosophy. He was extraordinarily successful in convincing members of his audience to undertake more advanced studies. As the names of students who asked questions in this course show, many of them later became professors of political science and philosophy.

Introducing students to political philosophy, Strauss also introduced them (and the readers of this transcript of his lectures) to his own distinctive approach.[ii] Marking the

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[i] For a list of the courses Strauss offered at the University of Chicago see George Anastaplo, "Leo Strauss at the University of Chicago," in Kenneth L. Deutsch and John A. Murley, *Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 14–18. The descriptions of the courses can be a bit misleading. For example, and most relevant to this transcript, the first course listed for spring quarter, 1960 as an "Introduction to Political Philosophy: Study of Aristotle's *Politics*" was, in fact, a seminar, as the transcript of that course shows. I remembered the winter 1965 course by the same title as being "primarily on Aristotle's *Politics*," as Anastaplo comments. In fact, however, Strauss devoted only seven of the sixteen lectures to Aristotle.

[ii] Strauss did not associate introductory courses per se with lectures or a survey. He seems to have thought more in terms of the subject matter and the correct approach to take in studying it. At the beginning of the seminar he gave on Aristotle's *Politics* in the spring quarter of 1960, he explained that he called this course an "Introduction to Political Science," because he wanted to make clear that he did "not regard Aristotle's teaching as a historical subject." After presenting a very brief account of the history of political philosophy in his first lecture, Strauss concluded not merely that "the mature approach of present-day social science presupposes the experience of the failure of the earlier approaches," but that "we cannot know that [Aristotle's] teaching was wrong if we do not know first what his teaching was." And that "means that we have to understand him in his own terms." Strauss then divided the *Politics* into fifteen segments for the sake of assigning

death of Winston Churchill at the beginning of lecture 6, Strauss gave one of his most concise statements of his understanding of the glory as well as the limitations of politics and the duty of one who studies it. Recalling Churchill's adamant opposition to Hitler, Strauss proclaimed that "the contrast between the indomitable and magnanimous statesman and the insane tyrant . . . was one of the greatest lessons which man can learn, at any time" (session 6). Yet, Strauss continued, "No less enlightening is the lesson conveyed by Churchill's failure . . . the fact that Churchill's heroic action on behalf of human freedom against Hitler only contributed, through no fault of Churchill's, to increasing the threat to freedom which is posed by Stalin or his successors." Churchill's writings were "not a whit less important than his deeds and speeches." So, Strauss reflected,

"The death of Churchill reminds us of the limitations of our craft, and therewith of our duty. We have no higher duty and no more pressing duty than to remind ourselves and our students, of political greatness, human greatness, of the peaks of human excellence. For we are supposed to train ourselves and others in seeing things as they are, and this means above all in seeing their greatness and their misery."[iii]

And he concluded, "In our age this duty demands of us in the first place that we liberate ourselves from the supposition that value statements cannot be factual statements" (session 6). The critique of positivism Strauss gave in the first third of this lecture course was designed to effect just such a liberation.

I. The Contemporary Obstacles to the Study of Political Philosophy: Positivism and Historicism

Strauss begins his "Introduction to Political Philosophy" by emphasizing the importance of the subject. "All political action points toward the question of the good society, and the good society is *the* theme of political philosophy" (session 1). In seeking knowledge of the best form of political association (and thus of all lesser forms which could be understood to be such only in the light of the best), classical political philosophers like Plato and Aristotle did not distinguish between political philosophy and political science. Today, however, political philosophy and political science are not merely thought to be

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students' papers, two per book except for one on book 8. In that seminar he spent much less time than in the 1965 course bringing out the problematic character of the contemporary denial that political philosophy is possible any longer and correspondingly more time on a detailed commentary on the *Politics* itself. As in this 1965 course, so in the lecture course he gave on the "Basic Principles of Classical Political Philosophy" in autumn 1961, Strauss began with eight lectures on "the crisis of our times" which duplicate many of the arguments he gives in the 1965 course concerning the problems posed by positivism and historicism, but the treatment he gives of Aristotle's *Politics* in "Basic Principles" does not follow the text as closely as these lectures do.

[iii] A fuller statement of Strauss's views on education can be found in "What Is Liberal Education?" and "Liberal Education and Responsibility" in *Liberalism: Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 3–25

different: political philosophy has become incredible because people no longer believe that it is possible to know what the good society really and truly is.

Strauss begins his lectures, therefore, by critically examining the two contemporary schools of thought that have led many people to believe that political philosophy is no longer possible: "positivism" and "historicism." Similar critiques can be found in *Natural Right and History,* "An Epilogue" to the *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics,* and "What Is Political Philosophy?"[iv] The presentation and critique of these schools of thought in this lecture course is more historical than these. The course is designed to show, first, that both positivism and historicism depend upon claims about the history of human thought that need to be tested by an independent examination of that history. In the second part of the course Strauss thus presents a curtailed account of that history to show that according to the testimony of the philosophers involved, the central issue dividing the ancients from the moderns concerns the character of nature as a whole and whether it supplies a standard of justice or right. Having argued that modern philosophy leads to Kant's denial that nature supplies such a standard but that Nietzsche reveals the difficulties resulting from such a denial, in the third part of the course Strauss reexamines the classical statement in Aristotle's *Politics* of the ancient position that the moderns opposed.[v]

By identifying the specific origins of positivism in the works of Auguste Comte and Georg Simmel, Strauss shows that neither the original nor the contemporary form of positivistic social science was a necessary or logical consequence of either philosophy or modern natural science. In "What Is Political Philosophy?" Strauss also names Comte as the first philosopher who argues that the development of modern natural science necessarily culminates in a "positive political philosophy," but in these lectures Strauss goes on to explain what Comte taught. Strauss acknowledges that the Comtean position is by no means identical to current positivism, but he declares that "we cannot understand the positivism of today without having first understood Comte" (session 1).

Comte's "positive philosophy" consisted of an argument about the history of the development of the human mind and the necessarily comprehensive, self-reflective character of social science. In his two chief works, Strauss explains, Comte traced the intellectual development of humanity in three stages. In the first, "theological" stage human beings thought they could answer the grandest questions and exercise unlimited control over the world by substituting for the things wills they could influence. In the second, "metaphysical" stage these willing beings were replaced by abstract forces or

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[iv] *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 35–80; "An Epilogue," *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics,* ed. Herbert J. Storing (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Co., 1962), 307–27; and *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959), 9–55.

[v] Transcripts of the lectures Strauss gave on Aristotle in his 1965 "Introduction to Political Philosophy" as well as his 1960 "Introduction to Political Science," his 1961 seminar devoted to "Basic Problems of Political Philosophy," and the last seminar taught at the University of Chicago on "Aristotle's Political Philosophy" in fall 1967 can be found on the website of the Leo Strauss Center: https://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/courses.

"entities." But in the third, positive stage man abandoned the question of the origin and destiny of things, i.e., the *why*, and began asking merely how things are related.[vi]

Although the theological and metaphysical approaches retained a certain practical superiority at the time because they claimed to answer all questions, Comte thought that the victory of positive philosophy was inevitable. He observed that the human mind is powerfully disposed to unity of method. However, as a result of the metaphysical critique of religion and the development of the modern sciences—beginning with mathematics, but then extending to physics, chemistry, and biology—human beings at his time lived in a state of intellectual and therefore moral and political anarchy. The development of a comprehensive science of man was thus imperative, both theoretically and practically. This science, for which Comte coined the terms "sociology" and "positive philosophy," was not merely the last science to develop. Although it presupposed biology in the way biology presupposes chemistry and physics presupposes mathematics, Comte recognized that his positive philosophy had to be the science of science, because he saw that science is a human activity and needed to be understood as such. He also observed that human beings cannot live together except on the basis of some fundamental agreements; but the critiques leveled by "metaphysical" philosophy in the seventeenth century had destroyed belief in Catholicism, the religious dogma of the Middle Ages. Science had become the only possible source of intellectual authority; but the goal and character of the science of science had not become clear until the French Revolution and its aftermath showed that humanity had a common destiny, because history is progressive.

Like contemporary positivists, Strauss points out, Comte insisted that science is the only form of true knowledge. Unlike contemporary positivists, however, Comte also thought that science could show us the best form of government. His "positive philosophy" was not value-free, and Comte continued to describe his investigations as "political philosophy." Comte's scientific approach did lead him to deny that there is any essential difference between human beings and animals. Like earlier modern philosophers he observed that human beings are driven primarily by their passions. But he opposed the "metaphysical," abstract notion of a "state of nature" in which individuals contract with one another to construct a government by observing that human beings live in society with one another at all times and in all places and that these societies are not the products of intentional design so much as spontaneous growths. Comte nevertheless thought that the progressive development of the distinctively human rational faculty would gradually change the way in which human beings organize their common life. As the division of labor that constitutes society becomes greater, individuals lose a sense of the common good. Coercive authority thus becomes necessary to check the selfish, asocial passions of individuals. In earlier times the subordination of the productive classes to the rule of warriors had to be justified by theology; but with the advance of science and industry, religion could be replaced by positive philosophy, and the military by captains of industry and bankers. Positive philosophers would not hold explicitly political offices; they would

[vi] Strauss observes in passing that Comte's claim about the questions raised has been refuted by modern biology, but that his thesis about science addressing the question of how rather than why has nonetheless survived.

tend to the spiritual development of their people by shaping public opinion and using a free press to critique the government.

Strauss concludes that Comte vastly overestimated the power of reason. His vision of an ever more pacific, prosperous, and rational future was not consonant with his understanding of human nature as basically passionate. Although Comte acknowledged the natural right of every human being to be treated in accord with the dignity of man, Comte's emphasis on the intellectual development of a few individuals in a system of ever greater specialization meant that human beings would become increasingly unequal. He also thought that the fate of half the human race was biologically determined. In contrast to the "traditional" view that Elizabeth I and Catherine the Great were quite good at governing, Strauss reports, Comte declared that women are not naturally fit to govern. Ability to predict the future course of events is not necessarily a test of the truth of a philosophical claim, Strauss concedes, but a mistaken prediction does count against a thinker who claims to know the necessary course of history. Alexis de Tocqueville proved to be a better predictor of the future course of history than Comte when he declared that progressive democratization, rather than science, would make government more stable.

Strauss emphasizes two differences between Comte and present day-positivism. First, for Comte positive science is merely the rationalization and universalization of common sense. He observed that human beings at all time and places perceive the need for a theory on the basis of which to select relevant facts to bring order to their common lives. For contemporary positivists, however, there is a radical difference between science and common sense.[vii] The second and more practically important difference is that, unlike Comte, contemporary positivists insist that social science must be value-free. This demand might appear to arise from the "Is-Ought" distinction, i.e., from the proposition that no statement about what ought to be can logically be derived from a statement about what is. But, Strauss reminds his auditors, neither of the two philosophers who first announced the "Is-Ought" distinction (David Hume and Immanuel Kant) thought that it was impossible to know what ought to be. What is characteristic of contemporary positivism is the further assertion that we cannot know the Ought, whereas we can have scientific knowledge of the Is. And, Strauss argues, this positivist assertion rests on the conviction that there are many ultimate values (extending beyond moral duties to beauty and other nonmoral choices or commitments) that are fundamentally incompatible and hence irreducible to one.

Strauss explains that this view emerged in the last decade of the nineteenth century in Germany, but became accepted in the United States only after World War I. The first statement of it is to be found in the two-volume, 600-page *Introduction to Moral Science* (*Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft*) Georg Simmel published in 1892. "What is called 'normative science,'" Simmel explained, "is in fact only science of the normative. Science itself does not establish or prove norms, but merely explains norms and their

[vii] In this respect, Strauss comments, contemporary positivists are truer descendants of Descartes, who introduced the notion that everything must be doubted and all knowledge rationally reconstructed.

correlations. For science always raises only causal, not teleological questions" (session 3). But Strauss objects that the causal rather than teleological character of modern science cannot possibly be a sufficient reason for the view that social science must be value-free. Spinoza was the greatest and most outspoken enemy of all teleology, and his chief work is entitled *Ethics.* On his first reading, Strauss admits, he had not perceived the revolutionary character of Simmel's claim, because Simmel announced it so matter-of-factly.[viii] Simmel could completely "break with the whole tradition of ethics in all its forms, without any apparent awareness of the immensity . . . of this change," Strauss later concluded, only because Simmel was writing in a nation that had been bombarded for a decade with Nietzsche's "immoralist" argument that no knowledge of good and evil is possible (session 3). (And Nietzsche had clearly announced the revolutionary character of his teaching.) Reading Simmel in light of Nietzsche, Strauss saw that Simmel still accepted the positivistic view of the objectivity of science, but combined it with Nietzsche's view of the nonobjectivity of values. Max Weber announced the same view later with much greater passion; and after Weber, proscribing value judgments from scientific studies became a matter of intellectual integrity.

Strauss treats Weber's arguments in much greater detail in *Natural Right and History.* The point of the history of positivism he presents in these lectures is to show that the philosophical reasons frequently given for the now widely-accepted distinction between "facts" and "values" do not justify or explain the emergence of the doctrine. People may believe that the only genuine form of knowledge is scientific knowledge, but such a conviction did not prevent Comte from thinking that science could—and should—tell us how to live. Earlier modern philosophers had emphasized the causal rather than teleological character of modern science and distinguished the "Is" from the "Ought," but neither causal analysis nor their recognition of the logical distinction between the Is and the Ought prevented these philosophers from putting forth moral arguments. The claim that human beings do not and cannot know what is good or evil originated with Nietzsche, and Nietzsche pointed out that "truth" and "knowledge," i.e., "science" itself, is among the unjustified and unjustifiable "values."

Positivistic social science cannot demonstrate that social science itself is good, Strauss concludes, because that would be a value judgment. Positivist social science cannot even describe human social life accurately, because it is impossible to account for phenomena like corruption, crime, or degeneracy without using evaluative terms. Most fundamentally, social science presupposes the ability to tell who or what is a human being, and that ability is based, more or less articulately, on understanding what is a normal or completely developed human. Social science thus depends on prescientific "commonsense" knowledge that not only distinguishes *human* being from all other forms as a matter of fact but also entails an evaluation.

As in his published writings, so in these lectures Strauss insists that the positivist demand that a social scientist treat good and evil equally and indifferently necessarily produces

[viii] In his 1960 seminar on Aristotle's *Politics* Strauss suggests that he learned that Simmel was the first man to argue for a value-free social science from Arnold Brecht's *Political Theory.* Strauss responds to Brecht's criticism of his own arguments in *NRH* later in these lectures.

moral obtuseness. But, Strauss also observes, most social scientists take a very definite moral, even political position. They do not perceive the nihilistic consequences of the fact-value distinction, because they think that if there is no reason to prefer one value to another, all values must be equal. And if all values are equal, they ought to be treated as equal. So if there is a conflict among the values people hold, the majority ought to decide. In other words, there is a close if unacknowledged connection between the widespread acceptance of the "fact-value" distinction and liberal democratic political prejudices.[ix] People have not perceived the blatant inability of a "value-free" social science to provide them with politically relevant information and guidance, because the outcome of World War II and its aftermath made scientific progress and the spread of egalitarian politics appear to be "the wave of the future." And it does not make sense to ask about what is good or bad, if the future is already determined.

If positivism arises as a compromise between Nietzschean historicism and objective science, as in Simmel, but science itself proves to be an unjustifiable value as much as any moral judgment or religion, we should not be surprised to learn that positivism collapses ultimately into historicism. In a rare response to his critics, Strauss shows how and why.

In *Political Theory: The Foundations of Twentieth-Century Political Thought* (1959), Arnold Brecht accused Strauss of misrepresenting Weber's position in *Natural Right and History*.[x] According to Brecht, Weber did not argue that all values are equal; he maintained simply that their validity was "equally undemonstrable" (session 5). That was true, moreover, only of "ultimate" values. Weber "recognized of course that each value can be judged scientifically as to its accordance with known standards, *as long as these standards are not themselves at issue*."[xi] Strauss objects, however, that "from the point of view of social science, the standards are necessarily at issue, since all value judgments are rationally questioned." Social scientists have to use words like "crime" in quotation marks, because the words themselves convey disapproval. Brecht also challenged Strauss's claim that positivist social scientists cannot recognize the superiority of civilization to cannibalism. In reply Strauss points to the work of anthropologists like Ruth Benedict, and then states more generally: if social scientists could demonstrate the superiority of civilization to cannibalism, they would have shown that value judgments can be validated scientifically and so disproved the fundamental positivist contention.

Strauss then suggests that Ernst Nagel's response to his arguments in *Natural Right and History* goes further. In *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* (1961) Nagel concedes that "a large number of characterizations sometimes assumed to be purely factual descriptions of social phenomena do indeed formulate a

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[ix] Strauss makes a similar argument in "An Epilogue." See n. iv above.

[x] Strauss incorporates many of the arguments and some of the same examples he gave in his critique of Weber in *NRH* into these lectures.

[xi] Arnold Brecht, *Political Theory: The Foundations of Twentieth-Century Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 262.

type of value judgment."[xii] He admits, moreover, that it is often difficult to separate means entirely from ends, and that values can be attached to both. Nagel thinks that he can rescue the positivist position by distinguishing value judgments that express approval or disapproval from those that express an estimate of the degree to which some commonly recognized type of action, object, or institution is embodied in a given instance. The key point, Strauss thinks, is that Nagel admits that such "characterizing" value judgments are inevitable (session 5).

By characterizing the principle of causality, upon which all modern science rests as "only a contingent historical fact . . . for it is logically possible that in their efforts at mastering their environments men might have aimed at something quite different," Nagel, Strauss argues, shows how positivism leads eventually to historicism without realizing that he is doing so. The reason positivism collapses into historicism is that modern science cannot answer the question, why science? "Teleological" philosophers like Aristotle had argued that science or knowledge is the fulfillment and thus the perfection of human nature. Having cut free from such a teleological view of nature, early modern philosophers like Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes suggested that science could relieve the human condition. But that did not explain or justify mathematicians' study of prime numbers, for example, i.e., science merely for the sake of science. Nor was it clear to later thinkers exactly what would benefit or please most if not all human beings. It was at least partly the difficulty of defining what precisely constitutes "the greatest good for the greatest number" that led social scientists like Simmel and Weber to jettison utilitarianism in favor of their positivist assertion of the indemonstrability of all ultimate values.

Strauss concludes that the inadequacy of the positivist contention that all genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge is revealed by the dependency of all social "scientific" knowledge on a prescientific understanding of humanity. Historicism constitutes a more serious challenge to the possibility of political philosophy, because historicism begins by recognizing that human existence is not like all other existence. Contrary to certain popular forms of "cultural relativism," historicism does not rest merely on the observation that human beings disagree about the answers to the most fundamental questions. Like positivism, historicism grows out of a certain understanding of the history of philosophy. The disagreements among past philosophers about the answers to the most fundamental questions may have appeared scandalous in the eyes of others, but each philosopher continued to pronounce what he thought was true in opposition to the errors of others. Only after Jean-Jacques Rousseau suggested that human nature was changeable, and that the changes occurred particularly in the rational faculty as a result of a process of socialization, did philosophers begin to think that the differences in comprehensive views from time to time and place to place might not merely be significant but had a progressive order. Both the rational and the progressive character of the development could be established, however, only after the process or change had come to completion. That argument was first made by G.W.F. Hegel. With the secularization of Christianity in the declaration of the universal rights of man during the French Revolution and the subsequent institution of states in Europe explicitly based on

[xii] Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), 491–92.

that principle, Hegel contended that the question which had animated political philosophy—namely, what is the just society?—had been definitively answered, and that it could not have been correctly answered earlier.

Strauss observes that Hegel's claims about the achievement of knowledge and the just state were subject to proof or disproof like any previous claims. The problem posed by history came to light only when nineteenth-century historians like Leopold von Ranke accepted the notion that every epoch has its own truth but denied that history is rational or progressive, because they thought that history is an ongoing process that has no end in the sense of completion. The historical insight thus culminated in the proposition that there is no eternal truth.

Nietzsche first disclosed the problematic consequences of this historicist insight in his essay "On the Use and Abuse of History." "History teaches a truth that is deadly," according to Nietzsche. "It shows that culture is possible only if men are fully dedicated to principles of thought and action, which they do not question" (session 6). But history also shows us that the principles of previous thought and action do not possess the validity they claim and do not, therefore, deserve to be regarded as simply true. The answer might seem to lie in the fabrication of a new myth, but Nietzsche saw that would involve a kind of deliberate self-delusion impossible for men of intellectual probity. The true solution comes to sight only when one realizes that scientific history suffices to show the relative validity of all previous principles of thought and action, but it does not allow the uncommitted "objective" observer to understand the vital source of previous history, precisely because he does not share or have a commitment. The principles that claimed to be rational or of divine origin were, Nietzsche argued, human creations. What was necessary now was for human beings to do consciously what they had done unconsciously in the past. But, Strauss explains, Nietzsche's further suggestion that all these goals were products of a universal will to power looked like a relapse into metaphysics.[xiii] Later historicists attempted to retain Nietzsche's insight that there cannot be historical objectivity but to avoid asserting a transhistorical truth.

In explicating and critiquing the "radical historicist" position, Strauss confronted the difficulty that the thinker he considered to be the most competent exponent of that position, Martin Heidegger, had not written in English.[xiv] As in *Natural Right and History*, so in these lectures Strauss thus gives a brief summary of the problem as Heidegger presents it at the beginning of *Being and Time* without grounding his discussion explicitly on Heidegger's text.[xv] As in the lecture course Strauss gave in 1961, "Basic Principles of Classical Political Philosophy," he then tries to explain the basic

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[xiii] Strauss gives a more detailed analysis of Nietzsche's argument and the difficulty in which it culminates in "Note on the Plan of *Beyond Good and Evil*" in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 174–91.

[xiv] In session 6 Strauss comments: "Vulgar historicism is traced to man: —in the subtle and theoretical historicism of Heidegger, it is traced to what he calls *Sein*, which is X, the ground of all history, working in and through man."

[xv] *NRH*, 25–33.

claims and the difficulties with those claims on the basis of an admittedly less satisfactory presentation of the position in English by the historian R. G. Collingwood.

Reflecting on his own practice as an archaeologist in his *Autobiography*, Collingwood first came to a new understanding of knowledge as composed not simply of propositions, but of propositions that were answers to questions. In reading the political theories of Plato and Hobbes Collingwood then discovered that they were not giving answers to the same question. They were writing about different things: Plato about the best form of the ancient *polis*, and Hobbes about the modern state.[xvi] Collingwood concluded that there are no eternal questions. All human thought rests ultimately on absolute presuppositions, which differ from historical epoch to historical epoch. These absolute presuppositions cannot be judged to be true or false, because they are not answers to questions but the presuppositions of the questions. The most an historian can do is to trace the changes in comprehensive views that arise as a result of changes in these absolute presuppositions.[xvii] The problem with this view, Strauss points out, lies in the status of the historicist presupposition itself—that each era has its own presuppositions. The historicist contradicts himself by treating the presupposition of his own age as simply true. Because he believes that his own age is superior, he cannot take the thought of past ages seriously.[xviii]

II. *The Necessity of Studying the History of Political Philosophy*

Although Strauss concludes that the historicist position articulated by Collingwood is untenable, he nevertheless agrees with the historicists that in our time philosophy must to a certain extent become fused with history. The reason Strauss gives differs, however, from those Collingwood gave in his *Idea of History*. Strauss argues:

"Every attempt at rational knowledge, philosophic or scientific, consists in replacing opinions by knowledge. This cannot be conscientiously done if one does

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[xvi] Speaking as an historian, Strauss agrees with Collingwood that the ancient *polis* and the modern state are not the same. He uses the opportunity, in fact, to urge students to learn as much of the original languages as possible so that they will not remain victims of well-intentioned, but often inaccurate translators.

[xvii] Strauss explicitly incorporates sections of his review of Collingwood's *Idea of History,* "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," *Review of Metaphysics* 5 (1952): 559–86.

[xviii] A historicist can avoid this contradiction, Strauss observes, if he argues that his age constitutes an "absolute moment" at which the truth about the historicity of all thought becomes (and can only become) clear and gives reasons for that conclusion. In "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," *SPPP,* 32–33, Strauss attributes such an argument to Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. In these lectures he states that Heidegger developed the historicist argument much more subtly than Collingwood. He refers particularly to Heidegger's call for the initiation of a dialogue between East and West. Such a dialogue would expand the horizons of both the Easterner and the Westerner, Strauss suggests, but Heidegger does not think that either would ever have the same view as the other. Strauss also comments on the significance of Heidegger's calling for a dialogue between the Far East and the West in "Existentialism," the first of "Two "Lectures by Leo Strauss," ed. David Bolotin, Christopher Bruell, and Thomas L. Pangle, *Interpretation* 22 (1995): 317.

not first know the opinions from which one starts. But . . . what we regard as our opinions consists to a considerable extent of the sediments of past discussions . . . in earlier centuries, and now we live on their results. Hence the nonhistorical concern with the clarification of our opinions insensibly shifts into historical studies" (session 8).

Positivist political science discourages the study of the history of political philosophy, but, Strauss reminds his auditors, Comte founded positivism on the basis of a history of human thought. In order to determine whether current opinions are true or false, it thus seems necessary from any point of view to study the history of political philosophy. In opposition to both the positivists and the historicists, however, Strauss insists that we must be open to the possibility that past thinkers knew something that we have forgotten.

To study the history of political philosophy, Strauss then observes, we need to divide it into parts or periods. Looking to find divisions within the material itself, he finds the clearest break with previous thought in the works of Thomas Hobbes. Presenting a much-abbreviated version of the history he gives in much greater detail elsewhere, Strauss notes that the decisive break actually took place before Hobbes, when Machiavelli announced in chapter 15 of his *Prince* that he was departing from the writings of others in teaching a prince how not to be good if he wants to maintain his state. Strauss nevertheless concentrates on Hobbes, because he formulates the modern position in terms of natural law, and, Strauss emphasizes, "the lowering of the standards has to do with a profoundly changed posture toward nature" (session 8). Plato, Aristotle, the whole tradition of "classical political philosophy" that stems from Socrates sought "to delineate the character of the just society by taking their bearings by men's perfection, by the highest in them. And these modern thinkers . . . tried to take their bearings by the lowest, but for this very reason the most powerful in man" (session 8).

According to Hobbes, Strauss reminds his auditors, human life in the "state of nature" is "solitary, nasty, brutish, and short." Because human desires can never be satisfied, it is impossible to achieve "the repose of the mind satisfied. For there is no such *finis ultimus* (utmost aim) nor *summum bonum* (greatest good), as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers" (*Leviathan*, chapter 11). Human beings must have some fixed point by which to take our bearings, and "Hobbes finds it in the beginning" (session 8). Although human beings cannot achieve happiness, Hobbes maintains that we can attain a certain amount of security and peace by fleeing the state of nature and contracting with others to relinquish our natural right to everything to a sovereign who will see that the "natural law" is enforced.

Admitting that the practical consequences Locke draws are far different from those to be found in Hobbes, in these lectures Strauss nevertheless skips Locke because he thinks that in many respects Locke's fundamental scheme is not so different from that of Hobbes. Strauss concentrates instead on Rousseau's critique

of Hobbes, because this critique brings modern political philosophy to its first crisis.[xix] If human beings are solitary or presocial in the state of nature, Rousseau pointed out in his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality,* human beings must also be prerational. Rousseau thus challenges the traditional definition of man as a rational animal in a way Hobbes did not. It might seem that a stupid animal could not serve as a standard of natural right. Rousseau argues that natural liberty merely allows a person to become a slave to his passions. True human liberty can be achieved only in a society where no one is subject to a law he does not take part in making. Both the rationality and the justice of the "general will" are guaranteed by its form: each wills what he desires not only for himself but for all others as well. By living according to the general will, Rousseau adds, a person acquires moral as well as civic liberty. Rousseau does not make the grounds of this moral freedom clear, however. In the profession of faith of the Savoyard vicar in his *Emile,* Rousseau presents the issue of moral liberty in terms of traditional dualistic, metaphysics. "But," Strauss observes, "according to Rousseau himself, that metaphysics is exposed to insoluble objections" (session 8). Rousseau also clings to a notion of natural goodness, rooted in the *sentiment de son existence,* that is fundamentally different from rational moral liberty. One of Rousseau's objections to Hobbes is that human beings would not strive to preserve themselves if they did not perceive that life is good.

Strauss then explains how "Kant solved Rousseau's problem, and put therewith moral and political philosophy on an entirely new basis. And the net result . . . is that from Kant on, the moral law is no longer a natural law"[xx] (session 8). According to Kant, morality cannot be based on dualistic metaphysics, because God and the soul are unknowable. That does not mean that the opposite view, that everything is corporeal, is true. "Materialism, or the view underlying modern physics, has as its premise the principle of causality. And this principle of causality . . . had been subjected to a radical critique by David Hume" (session 9). The "gist of Hume's critique" was that science or rationality in the highest sense rests on an irrational foundation of mere custom. In opposing Hume, Kant asserts that science is rational, but that it is limited to the phenomenal world. "Reason supplies only the form of knowledge; for its content, it depends on sense experience" (session 9).

Although in his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant shows that reason is weak in the sphere of theory, he argues that it is sufficient to guide human practice. "Practical reason prescribes, without any borrowings whatever from experience, universally valid laws of action" (session 9). And because the moral law is not based in any way on experience, it can no longer be called, as it was before, the natural law.

[xix] Strauss presents a fuller version of this argument in *NRH,* chapters 4–6, and "The Three Waves of Modernity," in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss,* ed. Hilail Gildin (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 81–98.

[xx] I do not know of any other place that Strauss emphasizes Kant as the turning point away from a notion of nature as a source of standards of right except the transcript of the seminar he devoted to "Kant's Political Philosophy" the year after these lectures.

The moral law must be valid, not only for men, but for *all* intelligent beings. But if the moral law is to apply to God, it cannot be based on human nature. And it must apply to God, Kant would say, because if God's actions are not to be understood in terms of the moral law, then God might conceivably do unjust things. The moral law cannot be based on anything else or deduced from anything else—God or nature. It is the law of reason, pure reason, in no way dependent on experience. If one asks where it gets its content, Kant, like Rousseau, answers: from its form—the form of law, meaning generality, universality, and rationality, is sufficient to supply the moral law. And if this is the moral law, Strauss points out, it becomes impossible to criticize political proposals like universal peace or the United Nations on the grounds that they disagree with human nature or experience.

"Morality as Kant understands it liberates man from the tutelage of nature" (session 9). And Strauss quickly traces the consequences of that liberation. If man owes his dignity to the moral law alone, Fichte concluded, man's duty consists in subjugating everything else, in him and without him, to the moral law, because nothing else has any intrinsic worth. Marx then showed that if the moral law demands virtuous activity in the Aristotelian sense of the full development of one's distinctively human faculties, but the division of labor makes that impossible, it is necessary to abolish and overcome that division with technology. Nature is only an obstacle to be overcome; nature does not supply guidance in any way. Strauss quotes statements from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* to show that in modern political philosophy nature is not merely understood to be "immoderately wasteful, immoderately indifferent, devoid of intentions and considerateness, devoid of compassion and sense of justice, fruitful and desolate and uncertain at the same time" (*BGE* 9), but "every morality . . . is a work of tyranny against 'nature,' and also against 'reason'" (*BGE* 118; session 9). "That which for Kant was the justification of nature, namely, that nature is the only rational interpretation of sense data," Strauss concludes, " . . . has become doubtful for Nietzsche" (session 9). In other words, the understanding of nature characteristic of modern science has become, in Nagel's terms, "a historically contingent way of interpreting things" (session 9). Rather than knowledge of nature, modern "natural" science appears to be a human construct.

Strauss then contrasts this modern understanding of nature as the rational ordering of sense data with the classical understanding of nature as a term of distinction. The term (*physis*) first appears in *Odyssey* 10.300 where Hermes informs Odysseus about the "nature" of a certain herb—in effect, its look (*eidos*) and power (*dynamis*). It is then to be found in Thucydides's observations about the "nature" of a place, which he proceeds to describe as "the place itself" (4.3-4) and thus points to the difference between nature (or what is there) and art (what is made of it). Finally and most famously, Aristotle observes that fire burns in Persia just as it burns in Greece,[xxi] although the laws differ. On the basis of this distinction between nature and convention (which Strauss insists was not the

[xxi] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1134b25–27.

invention of the sophists), classical political philosophers raised the question whether there is anything just and noble by nature.[xxii]

In opposition to Collingwood, Strauss suggests that ancient and modern political philosophers ask the same question. He emphasizes, however, that they answer that question in importantly different ways and quotes Hegel's description of the difference:

"The manner of study in ancient times is distinct from that of modern times, in that the former consisted in the veritable training and perfecting of the natural consciousness. . . . Philosophizing about everything it came across—the natural consciousness transformed itself into a universality of abstract understanding. . . . In modern times, however, the individual finds the abstract form ready made" (session 9).

"What happened in classical philosophy, especially political philosophy," Strauss emphasizes, "is the primary acquisition of concepts . . . as distinguished from the use of concepts already acquired . . . there is not a single technical term in the properly political writings . . . of Plato and Aristotle. . . . What they do, especially Aristotle, is to define [these terms] more precisely, and this more precise definition became then the great heritage of the West" (session 9). In order for us "moderns" to unearth the experiences upon which the concepts in terms of which we understand our own experience are based, we must, therefore, study classical political philosophy—in its own terms, and not in ours.

III. The Classical Work of Classical Political Philosophy: Aristotle's Politics

Where, then, should we begin our study of classical political philosophy? Strauss suggests that we begin with Aristotle, rather than with Plato, the tragedians, or Thucydides, all of whom wrote earlier, because unlike Plato, the tragedians, or Thucydides, Aristotle speaks directly in his own name.

Because Aristotle begins his *Politics* with a definition of the political association or *polis,* the question immediately arises about how the word should be translated. Strauss agrees with Collingwood that *polis* should not be translated "state," because the ancients did not distinguish between "state" and "society." *Polis* can be accurately translated as "commonwealth," but, Strauss comments, selection of an appropriate term does not resolve the substantive issue. Aristotle defines the *polis* in terms of its end, the achievement of *eudaimonia* or happiness, which he equates with a life of virtue. We moderns tend to think that happiness is subjective. Schooled in the logic of the Declaration of Independence, Americans believe that people have many different notions of happiness, but they recognize the necessity of securing the conditions for the pursuit of happiness. Since the conditions are means to achieving another end, what the state does is, in one respect, lower than the private ends it serves. However, because private notions

[xxii] Strauss here gives an extremely abbreviated form of the argument he presents more fully in chapter 3 of *NRH*, "The Origin of the Idea of Natural Right," 81–164.

of happiness are merely subjective, whereas the conditions of pursuing it are objective, what the states does is, in another respect, higher. Modern people have invented a concept or term for the matrix of which state and society are a part: culture. But our concept of culture includes art and thought, whereas the classics thought that "*polis* and wisdom are not only distinguishable, but have a fundamentally different character, insofar as the *polis* is always this or that *polis*, whereas wisdom is universal." We no longer recognize the tension the classics saw between the *polis* and philosophy, because of a great movement called the Enlightenment, which suggested that wisdom could be diffused among the whole population so that the difference between the theoretically wise and theoretically unwise ceases to be important.

Aristotle argues not only that the *polis* is the highest and most comprehensive form of human association, because it has the highest and most comprehensive end, but also that both that end and the *polis* are natural. The *polis* is natural not merely because it is composed of smaller associations or parts, households, which develop naturally. It is natural because human beings can achieve their full development or completion only in such an association. So understood, the *polis* embodies the understanding of nature as a term of distinction and, Strauss points out, nature so understood can be used in the plural. Each kind of thing has its own nature. That nature defines it and its limits. Later in the *Politics* Aristotle thus suggests that the *polis* is natural in a third respect as well: it is a society large enough to fulfill all of man's essential natural needs, but small enough to be commensurate with the limitations of man's natural powers of knowing and caring. The proposition that the *polis* is natural also means that, in contrast to the poets, Aristotle does not think that the *polis* is sacred.

Having examined Aristotle's argument that the *polis* as a whole is natural, Strauss follows Aristotle by looking at its parts. Aristotle begins with the association between master and slave that he argues is a necessary part of the household (*oikos*) and asks whether slavery is natural or conventional. Once again, Strauss notes that nature provides the standard of what is just or unjust. Using the relation between soul and body as his primary example, Aristotle first suggests that nature as a whole is hierarchical. He then maintains that a human being who can understand and obey the commands of reason but cannot formulate such commands for himself is naturally a slave, but that it is unjust to enslave prisoners of war who are not naturally slaves as the Greek customarily did.

The art of household management includes knowledge of how to acquire and use the nonhuman as well as human forms of property necessary to live a good life. But Aristotle distinguishes this natural form of acquisition, which is limited to what one can use, from the unlimited and therefore unnatural art of making money. Aristotle points out that everything has two kinds of uses—one proper to itself and another not. A shoe, for example, can be worn or exchanged for something else. Strauss observes that Marx picked up this Aristotelian distinction between use and exchange value, but that Marx gave it a very different interpretation because he combined it with Locke's labor theory of value.

According to Locke and Marx, the origin of all true wealth is human production; nature merely supplies the almost worthless materials. At this point early in the *Politics* Aristotle suggests, on the contrary, that nature provides us with what we need. Modern thinkers consider nature to be something to be conquered but, Strauss points out, this modern view faces the difficulty that man owes his ability or potential to conquer nature not to himself but ultimately to nature itself. Aristotle's contention that the *polis* is natural also means that it is not, contrary to early modern political philosophy, the product of a contract or convention.

In contrast not merely to modern political philosophers but also and more immediately to Plato, as Strauss emphasizes, Aristotle argues that the *polis* is a distinct kind of association, not only different from but also higher than the household.

Recognizing his inability to comment on all parts of the text, Strauss selects the arguments in book 2 which reflect Aristotle's distinctive approach. In contrast to all his other treatises, Strauss observes, Aristotle begins his examination of the ideas of others about the best regime by explaining that he is not criticizing the others from ambition, because ambition is a passion that is particularly prominent in politics.[xxiii] He then argues that the communistic institutions Socrates proposes in the *Republic* would not be desirable, because human beings care only for things and people they understand to be their particular responsibility, i.e., because of their natural limitations as human beings. Strauss also points out that Aristotle appeals to the sense of decency of the well-brought-up people he explicitly said he was addressing in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1.1095b5-7), by arguing that the abolition of the private family would result in incest and that the abolition of private property would make it impossible for anyone to be temperate or generous.

Although Aristotle acknowledges both the novelty and beauty of the proposals Socrates makes in the *Republic*, he concludes that "if these proposals were sound, then people would have become aware of them" (2.1264a1-3). And Strauss comments: "Aristotle does not say that everything that is, is reasonable. But he says that what is reasonable is somehow known" (session 11). The political consequences of Aristotle's contention become manifest in his criticism of Hippodamus. Aristotle shows that Hippodamus's apparently simple scheme of dividing everything—citizens, laws, land—into thirds results in immense confusion, because he does not take account of the distinctively political but tries to interpret it on that basis of concepts supplied by science that deal with the subhuman. The most important example is his proposal that anyone who invents

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[xxiii] In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, which constitutes the first part of Aristotle's study of politics, Aristotle insists (1.1094b13–29) that the study of any subject must be suited to the character of the subject. Later in these lectures Strauss observes that the *Politics* contains the only two oaths to be found in Aristotle's entire corpus, and he suggests that the use of oaths reflects the controversial and passionate, because partisan, character of political arguments.

something of use to the city should be honored. Aristotle does not deny that human beings have made great progress since ancient times, not only in the arts and science, but also in politics. But, he warns, improvement in politics always comes at a cost because law owes it power to custom or habit *alone*—not to its intrinsic reasonableness. Any change in the law thus weakens the law. Strauss observes that this problem is still with us. The *polis* as *polis* has a recalcitrance to reason which cannot be overcome. That thought is expressed by Plato in his simile of the cave, but there are many other statements of it, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, e.g., in *Federalist* 49, Edmund Burke, and Macaulay's *History of England.*[xxiv]

Strauss makes only one more point about the contents of book 2 before he goes on to book 3, which contains "the fundamental discussion of Aristotle's *Politics*" (session 11). One of the three actual regimes which are supposed to be good—Sparta, Crete, and Carthage—is not a Greek city. Contrary to some historicist claims, Aristotle's analysis of the *polis* was not limited to "Greek city-states."

At the beginning of book 3 Aristotle again raises the question, What is the *polis*? That's strange, Strauss comments, because Aristotle has apparently already told us what the *polis* is in book 1. Aristotle raises the question again because the *polis* is shaped or defined most decisively by its form of government or *politeia.* *Politeia* is often translated as "constitution," but that is too legalistic. The *politeia* refers to the group of people who factually rule and thus make or determine what the law is. The question that animates political life is not whether people should live in a political association or not, but who should rule.[xxv]

Recognizing that there are different forms of government, Aristotle develops a basic table of six forms on the basis of the number of people ruling and whether they rule for the common benefit or in their own interest: The one monarch, few aristocrats, or many people in a polity rule for the common good, whereas a single tyrant, few oligarchs, and the multitude in a democracy rule in their own interest. As Aristotle makes clear in later books, there are varieties of these basic types and there can be mixtures.

[xxiv] Strauss admits that Aristotle's critique of Hippodamus's proposal seems to contradict what he says later (*Politics* 3.1287a30) about law as reason (*nous*). But, Strauss notes, in the *Ethics* (10.1180a22) Aristotle says that it is speech derivative from *some* practical wisdom. There is moreover another reason for the difference between the Thomist and Aristotelian teaching concerning the relation between reason and law. According to Aristotle, laws differ according to regime, and most regimes are defective. Hence their laws cannot be simply reasonable.

[xxv] This emphasis on the essentially controversial, because divisive, character of political life and debate most distinguishes Strauss's attempt to revive an Aristotelian understanding of politics from the attempts of contemporary scholars such as Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), and Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), to revive Aristotelian "virtue ethics."

Strauss admits that at first glance Aristotle's understanding of democracy as the rule of the many poor in their own interest appears to be very far from modern liberal or representative democracy. But Strauss points out that by "poor" Aristotle means those who have to work for a living. Modern and ancient democracies have something fundamental in common because neither has a property qualification for holding office. Modern democracy is more egalitarian than ancient democracy inasmuch as it does not recognize the legitimacy of slavery, but it is less democratic insofar as it does not select public officials primarily by lot. Election of individuals on the basis of merit is from an Aristotelian point of view an aristocratic institution; it characterizes the mixture of democracy and aristocracy that Aristotle later suggests is the best regime generally possible.

Political life is characterized by conflict because different groups raise claims to rule on the basis of different understandings of justice. Democrats say that equals should receive equal amounts, but oligarchs retort that unequals should be rewarded unequally. Citing his discussion of justice in his *Ethics* (5.1134b18–1135a8), Aristotle agrees that justice is proportional. He asks, however, equal and unequal in what? Democrats assert that they are equally free; oligarchs seek recognition for their superior wealth. But, Aristotle observes, a political association is not merely a defensive league or a trading alliance. It exists for the sake of living a good or noble life. Therefore, those with the most virtue have the best claim to rule. The question, then, is how this virtue is actually distributed. Each member of the demos may be less noble than one of the few gentlemen, but the demos as a whole may possess more virtue than a few. Likewise, if virtue gives someone a right to rule, the one best man may have the most. Aristotle thus presents his strongest argument on behalf of democracy followed by the case for the other extreme, rule by the one best man. Not merely may a democratic people possess more virtue in sum than its few most distinguished citizens. Using the example of an architect and the inhabitants of a house, Aristotle observes that there are some decisions that can be made better by the many people who receive services than by the few who provide them. However, although the members of a particularly virtuous *demos* would be able to participate in making deliberative and judicial decisions, they are not capable of serving in the highest offices. [xxvi] Because not all peoples are virtuous and their virtue is in the best case limited, Aristotle then turns to consider the claims of the one best man. Someone might object that not a man but the law should rule because law is intellect without passion, but, Aristotle observes, laws have to be formulated and administered by human beings. Because human beings are passionate and tend to favor themselves, it is best for more than one to rule and for them to rule and be ruled in

[xxvi] Athenian democracy was not, in fact, as purely democratic as Aristotle's description, Strauss observes, but Aristotle's "democracy" is not an "ideal type." It was not Aristotle's discovery; he simply took the claims democrats actually made and extended and clarified them. Modern readers tend to take their understanding of Athenian democracy from Pericles's funeral oration, but according to Thucydides (2.65) Athens under Pericles was the rule of one man and a democracy only in name.

turn. However, if there is one person so obviously superior to all others as to be virtually a god among men, it would not be just for that person to be ruled by anyone else.

Although book 4 clearly follows book 3, Strauss observes, the last sentence in book 3 points to the discussion of the best regime in books 7 and 8. The reason for this ambiguity in the order of the text is that "one cannot see the more or less imperfect regimes discussed in the central books without awareness of the best" (session 14). Because Strauss has emphasized Aristotle's contention that the nature of a thing can be understood only from its complete development, he thus turns to Aristotle's discussion of the best regime before he comments on Aristotle's discussion of the lesser, but more frequently encountered regimes in the central books of the *Politics*.[xxvii]

To determine what the best regime is, Aristotle reasons, we need to know what is the most choiceworthy form of life. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* he showed that there are three kinds of goods. Since both external and bodily goods are means to the achievement of the goods of the soul or virtue, he reasons, both individuals and polities should devote themselves to the acquisition and exercise of virtue. The end of the *polis* and the individual are thus the same. Aristotle observes, however, that there are two kinds of virtue: moral and intellectual. Because happiness consists in activity and the moral virtues are matters of practice, it might seem that they are the end. However, activity does not have to involve other people; on the contrary, Aristotle argues, contemplation is the highest and most self-sufficient form of activity. And Strauss comments that that means the end of the *polis* and the end of the individual are only analogous, not identical. According to Aristotle, a *polis* should concentrate on perfecting its internal order rather than expanding imperialistically, but a *polis* does not philosophize.

In constructing the best regime, Aristotle begins with the matter. There must be a large enough number of people to make the *polis* self-sufficient, but not too many to prevent them from knowing, trusting, and supervising each other. Aristotle then observes that there are seven indispensable kinds of work in every city provided by farmers, artisans, merchants, soldiers, the wealthy who supply a store of goods, priests, and the government. Some people may perform more than one function, e.g., farmers can be soldiers. But, Aristotle insists, those who do not contribute to

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[xxvii] In the seminars Strauss devoted entirely to Aristotle's *Politics* in spring 1960 and fall 1967, he follows the order of the text indicated by the Bekker numbers and takes up books 4–6 before 7–8. The emphasis Strauss puts on Aristotle's discussion of the best regime in these lectures distinguishes his presentation of Aristotle's *Politics* here from the chapter "On Aristotle's *Politics*" in *The City and Man* (the only essay Strauss published that was devoted exclusively to Aristotle). In concluding that chapter Strauss observes that "the guiding question of Aristotle's *Politics* is the question of the best regime," but is that question is "better discussed on another occasion." *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 48–49.

the end of the *polis* should not be citizens. Farmers, artisans, and merchants should be excluded, because they do not have the leisure required to acquire and exercise virtue. In the best regime, Strauss comments, there is no *demos.* The necessary tasks will be performed by slaves. To prevent them from rebelling, as in Sparta, the slaves should be promised emancipation if they behave. But, Strauss points out, if the slaves are capable of living as free men, they are not slaves by nature. This necessary injustice could be defended so long as there is an economy of scarcity. Most people would not have had the leisure needed to acquire the education requisite for ruling, and no one wants to be ruled by the unwise. Aristotle goes into great detail about the generation of children, but the most important question is education. Those who would participate in ruling needed to be educated "liberally," i.e., not as a slave. Although Aristotle recognizes that skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic can be used in trade, he argues that citizens need to learn them in order to contemplate (but not make) beautiful works of music. Such contemplation, Strauss suggests, is a reflection, but merely a reflection, of the excellence of the truly contemplative, philosophical life.

At the beginning of book 4 Aristotle insists that political science must do more than describe the best regime, as Plato does, or praise an existing regime like Sparta. To be useful to a legislator, political science must include knowledge of all regimes, which sort is appropriate for what kind of people, how to preserve or change each regime, and what the best generally possible regime is. People often see two and only two kinds of imperfect regimes: democracy and oligarchy. In fact, however, there are several kinds of democracies and several kinds of oligarchies. The differences arise from differences in the occupations or sources of wealth of the dominant class. In the best, because least extreme and thus least unjust form of democracy, as in the best because least extreme form of oligarchy, citizens are farmers who do not have time to gather in the city to attend political meetings; as a result the laws rule. Better still is a regime which mixes democratic and oligarchic elements so that rich and poor both share in rule and neither is expropriated or oppressed.[xxviii] To indicate how such a mixture can be constructed, Aristotle distinguishes three functions of government: deliberative, magisterial, and judicial. This distinction differs from the "separation of powers" Montesquieu later advocates, Strauss points out, because Montesquieu's overriding interest in checking and balancing the powers of the government is the security of the individual whereas Aristotle declared in book 1 that the *polis* is prior to the individual.

Investigating the causes of the preservation or change of regimes, Aristotle emphasizes that the decisive factor is "that the number of those who wish a regime to continue be greater than the number of those who do not" (1309b20). As we might infer from Aristotle's initial definition of political rule as the rule of

[xxviii] Strauss explains that the "middle class" that holds the balance in such a regime is not "bourgeois." Rousseau coined the term "bourgeois" to distinguish merchants from the "citizens" willing to fight for their country. In ancient cities, Aristotle observes, those who bear heavy arms became citizens (session 15).

other free and equal people in turn, in contrast to the rule of a master of slaves or father over children, Strauss points out that the *polis* is fundamentally democratic. The principle of democracy is freedom, and Aristotle shows that that means that democracy has two fundamental characteristics: first, ruling and being ruled in turn means that no citizen is simply a subject; and, second, each is to live as he pleases. "Some things in Aristotle remind one of Rousseau, but there is a very great difference . . . Aristotle does not suggest for one moment that in a democracy there must be a total submission of everyone in every respect to the general will" (session 15). The permissiveness of ancient democracy is as important as its egalitarianism.

The most obvious limitation of Aristotle's political science from a contemporary point of view is that he does not include the regimes that concern us most—liberal democratic, fascist, or communist—in his sixfold schema. But, Strauss contends, Aristotle enables us to understand their distinctive principle. By emphasizing the polarity between the fundamentally democratic character of the *polis* with the virtue and wisdom of the one best man, Aristotle lets us see that modern regimes presuppose the harmonization of the ends of the people and the philosopher. Modern science promises not only to enlighten the people but also to overcome the economy of scarcity. Modern democracies are based on technology, as Comte recognized when he predicted the rule of scientists (or, we would say, technocrats).[xxix]

And, Strauss suggests, the most fundamental limitation of Aristotle's political science comes to light from the most obvious difference between his political science and ours. Aristotle understands politics in terms of its end, happiness, and he understands happiness to be a life of virtue. Aristotle therefore devotes the first part of his two-part treatise on politics to ethics. That would be inconceivable for a contemporary positivist political scientist.

What, then, does Aristotle understand the end of politics—or virtue—to be? There are two peaks of moral virtue, as Aristotle presents it in his *Nicomachean Ethics:* justice in one's relations to others, and magnanimity as the sum of all virtues in an individual. In defining justice, Strauss observes, Aristotle distinguishes between conventional and natural but he declares that both kinds of justice are variable. Human beings can discern what is right (or just) under the circumstances, if they are prudent. But prudence also has two parts or aspects. A prudent person must be able not only to calculate the best means to any given end, but also to choose the right end. And to be able to choose the right end, a person must have been brought up well. But, Strauss asks, how do we know what constitutes a sound upbringing? The answer we get from looking at the characteristics Aristotle attributes to the magnanimous man is this: opinion.

[xxix] Cf. *NRH,* 36: "The difference between the classics and us with regard to democracy consists exclusively in a different estimate of the virtues of technology."

Strauss contrasts Aristotle's treatment of the moral virtues with Plato. In the dialogues we not only hear characters like Callicles and Thrasymachus ask, as Aristotle's decent auditors never would, why be decent or virtuous? In the *Republic* we also see Socrates provide a theoretical foundation for the virtues in an analysis of the parts of the soul. Aristotle never does that. In *De Anima* he states that theoretical wisdom is the end of man, but he never presents the moral virtues merely or explicitly as the means of achieving that end. If the moral virtues are seen merely to be means, he recognizes, they are no longer chosen for their own sake or truly virtuous. The problem becomes even worse, Strauss observes, if the virtues, like justice, are seen to be the necessary means of achieving the common good. As Machiavelli dramatically points out, if virtue consists in doing what is necessary to achieve the common good, what is usually considered to be vicious behavior will in certain circumstances be virtuous. To avoid Machiavellianism, we have to understand the *polis* as being for the sake of moral virtue. That is what Aristotle explicitly does. He recognizes that moral virtue is necessary to acquire theoretical virtue, but he does not pay attention to theoretical virtue in the *Politics,* because philosophy is not part of the city. He presents moral virtue as irreducible to any other end, not because it is absolute as in Kant, but because moral virtue is the place where the requirements of the two fundamental ends of man—theoretical life and society—meet. By arguing that evils in cities will not cease until philosophers become kings but then showing that is impossible by requiring the expulsion of everyone more than ten years of age from the city, in the *Republic* Plato reveals the limits, character, and nature of political things more clearly than Aristotle does. As illustrated by the noble lie, "the political community must be ascribed a naturalness, a sacredness, which it cannot truly claim, but which is necessary for its being a unity" (session 16).

At the end of his "Introduction" Strauss thus indicates more clearly than he does in *The City and Man* why he begins his examination of classical political philosophy with Aristotle, but moves back first to Plato and ultimately to Thucydides. These lectures are explicitly only an "introduction." In them Strauss explains perhaps more clearly and directly than in his published works why he thought political philosophy, which is not inherently an historical study, must begin in our time with a study of the history of political philosophy.

The Leo Strauss Transcript Project

Leo Strauss is well known as a thinker and writer, but he also had tremendous impact as a teacher. In the transcripts of his courses one can see Strauss comment on texts, including many he wrote little or nothing about, and respond generously to student questions and objections. The transcripts, amounting to more than twice the volume of Strauss's published work, add immensely to the material available to scholars and students of Strauss's work.

In the early 1950s mimeographed typescripts of student notes of Strauss's courses were distributed among his students. In winter 1954, the first recording, of his course on Natural Right, was transcribed and distributed to students. Strauss's colleague Herbert J. Storing obtained a grant from the Relm Foundation to support the taping and transcription, which resumed on a regular basis in the winter of 1956 with Strauss's course "Historicism and Modern Relativism." Of the 39 courses Strauss taught at the University of Chicago from 1958 until his departure in 1968, 34 were recorded and transcribed. After he retired from Chicago, recording of his courses continued at Claremont Men's College in the spring of 1968 and the fall and spring of 1969 (although tapes for his last two courses there have not been located), and at St. John's College for the four years until his death in October 1973.

The surviving original audio recordings vary widely in quality and completeness. and after they had been transcribed, the audiotapes were sometimes reused, leaving the audio record very incomplete. Over time the audiotape deteriorated. Beginning in the late 1990s, Stephen Gregory, then administrator of the University's John M. Olin Center for Inquiry into the Theory and Practice of Democracy funded by the John M. Olin Foundation, initiated digital remastering of the surviving tapes by Craig Harding of September Media to ensure their preservation, improve their audibility, and make possible their eventual publication. This project received financial support from the Olin Center and from the Division of Preservation and Access of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The remastered audiofiles are available at the Strauss Center website: https://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/courses.

Strauss permitted the taping and transcribing to go forward but did not check the transcripts or otherwise participate in the project. Accordingly, Strauss's close associate and colleague Joseph Cropsey originally put the copyright in his own name, though he assigned copyright to the Estate of Leo Strauss in 2008. Beginning in 1958 a headnote was placed at the beginning of each transcript: "This transcription is a written record of essentially oral material, much of which developed spontaneously in the classroom and none of which was prepared with publication in mind. The transcription is made available to a limited number of interested persons, with the understanding that no use will be made of it that is inconsistent with the private and partly informal origin of the material. Recipients are emphatically requested not to seek to increase the circulation of the

transcription. This transcription has not been checked, seen, or passed on by the lecturer." In 2008, Strauss's heir, his daughter Jenny Strauss, asked Nathan Tarcov to succeed Joseph Cropsey as Strauss's literary executor. They agreed that because of the widespread circulation of the old, often inaccurate and incomplete transcripts and the continuing interest in Strauss's thought and teaching, it would be a service to interested scholars and students to proceed with publication of the remastered audiofiles and transcripts. They were encouraged by the fact that Strauss himself signed a contract with Bantam Books to publish four of the transcripts although in the end none were published.

The University's Leo Strauss Center, established in 2008, launched a project, presided over by its director Nathan Tarcov and managed by Stephen Gregory, to correct the old transcripts on the basis of the remastered audiofiles as they became available, transcribe those audiofiles not previously transcribed, and annotate and edit for readability all the transcripts including those for which no audiofiles survived. This project was supported by grants from the Winiarski Family Foundation, Mr. Richard S. Shiffrin and Mrs. Barbara Z. Schiffrin, Earhart Foundation, and the Hertog Foundation, and contributions from numerous other donors. The Strauss Center was ably assisted in its fundraising efforts by Nina Botting-Herbst and Patrick McCusker of in the Office of the Dean of the Division of the Social Sciences at the University.

Senior scholars familiar with both Strauss's work and the texts he taught were commissioned as editors, with preliminary work done in most cases by student editorial assistants. The goal in editing the transcripts has been to preserve Strauss's original words as much as possible while making the transcripts easier to read. Strauss's impact (and indeed his charm) as a teacher is revealed in the sometimes informal character of his remarks. Readers should make allowance for the oral character of the transcripts. There are careless phrases, slips of the tongue, repetitions, and possible mistranscriptions. However enlightening the transcripts are, they cannot be regarded as the equivalent of works that Strauss himself wrote for publication.

Nathan Tarcov, Editor-in-Chief
Gayle McKeen, Managing Editor

August 2014

Editorial Headnote

Sessions 1 through 9 of this transcript were published in 2018 by the University of Chicago Press as *Leo Strauss on Political Philosophy: Responding to the Challenge of Positivism and Historicism*, edited by Catherine H. Zuckert. Sessions 10 through 16, which address classical political philosophy with a particular focus on Aristotle's *Politics*, are included here. The transcripts of sessions 1-5 and 7-10 are based on the

existing remastered audiofiles, which are available on the Leo Strauss Center website. The transcripts of sessions 6 and 11-16, for which they are no surviving audiofiles, are based on the original transcript, which was made by persons unknown to us. Ellipses that appear in the original transcript have been retained; ellipses in square brackets [. . .] replace the transcriber's "inaudible" unless otherwise noted. Ellipses that appear in the sessions for which there are audiofiles indicate that the words are inaudible.

This course was a lecture course which included both undergraduates and graduate students. In sessions 1-9 Strauss himself reads passages from the text, often making use of his own translations; in the later sessions a student serves as reader. The primary texts discussed in the course are Auguste Comte, *Course in Positive Philosophy* (1830-42); Georg Simmel, Introduction to Moral Science [*Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft*, 1892]; Arnold Brecht, *Political Theory: The Foundations of Twentieth-Century Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959); Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* (NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961); Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Use and Abuse of History," and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, First Part, sec. 15; R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, ed. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946) and *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939); *The Politics of Aristotle*, edited and translated by Ernest Barker (Oxford University Press, 1946). Citations are included for all passages read aloud.

Citations are provided to all passages so readers can read the transcripts with the texts in hand, and footnotes have been provided to identify persons, texts, and events to which Strauss refers.

This transcript was edited by Catherine Zuckert, with assistance from Les Harris and Philip Bretton.

For general information about the history of the transcription project and the editing guidelines, see the general note to the transcripts above.

The Transcript

Session 1: January 6, 1965

Comte as the Founder of Positivism: The Three Stages of the History of Mankind

Leo Strauss: [In progress] Political action is founded upon knowledge. Therefore, all political action points to knowledge of the politically good or bad. The complete political good, we call the good society. In every political action there is implied reference to the good society. All politically acting men are concerned with that; whether they call it the good society or call it by another name is a secondary question. There are people who would deny that there is anything to be called the common good, which is another way of speaking of the good society. But these same people speak of the "open society," by which they mean the good society. President Johnson likes to speak of the Great Society, which is in its wording somewhat different from the good society. But I think President Johnson means by "the Great Society" the good society. Why he and other contemporaries prefer to speak of the Great Society rather than of the good society is an interesting question, but [one] which doesn't have to concern us here now.

Now if this is so, if all concern with political things, all political action, points towards the question of the good society, and the good society is *the* theme of political philosophy, one seemingly paradoxical consequence follows: that there is no fundamental distinction between political philosophy and political science. This was the older view, according to which the study of the more or less imperfect societies is part of the same study which is concerned above all with the good society. This can be compared with the relation between physiology and pathology: they are in a way separable, but obviously the study of the healthy body and its workings points to the possibility of diseases, and[1] you cannot diagnose the diseases unless you know what a healthy body is. This is the way in which above all Plato in the *Republic* and Aristotle in the *Politics* deal with all kinds of political societies, perfect or imperfect.

The situation in which we find ourselves today is characterized by the fact that, in the first place, political philosophy is thought to be radically different from political science. In the mildest form, political science is a whole of which political philosophy is one of many parts. But it is clearer and more straightforward to say that political philosophy is no longer credible at all, and that it is partly the continuation of an ever-weakening tradition which explains the fact that political philosophy is still academically recognized. Political philosophy is no longer credible, and political science takes its place—to make this quite clear: a *nonphilosophic* political science. This is, if not the full reality today, at least the tendency.

Now while this is true and could easily be borne out by quotations, it is also true that political science is in need of what is called political theory, and in this respect I think there is unanimity. Theory, in contradistinction to philosophy, can be scientific. Think of the theory of numbers, theory of functions, theory of evolution, and so on. These are all

scientific phenomena. Political theory, according to this view, is a branch of political science among others; only look at the announcements of this department [to] see that this is the prevailing view. All fields of political science are related with the others. For example, agricultural politics and foreign aid are in foreign relations. But political theory is more related to the other fields than any others among themselves. Political theory is the most general of the fields of political science.

What is political theory? You would help me if you would answer me that question, because I have some notion of what has been suggested in the course of the last thirty years as to what political theory is, but there is a great variety of opinions. Perhaps the most articulate among you [would] tell me. Well, since I seem to be unable to overcome this shyness so becoming young people, I will at least give a few of the views which I have found. [Laughter] You find the view, for example, that political theory, this universal discipline which has its finger in all pies, is needed for guiding research. It is the theory of theory-formulations, one could say. Political theory thus understood does not meet, does not claim to meet, the political issues,[2] the so-called "isms." Therefore, there is another understanding of political theory according to which political theory is that pursuit which is primarily concerned with the "isms"—democracy, communism, fascism—dealing with the ideologies, the operative ideals, of course, primarily within the United States, with ideals operative within the United States. Political theory thus understood is not possible without history.[3] For example, you cannot understand the American operative ideals without understanding what the United States Constitution was originally meant to be. You have to study the *Federalist* papers, and if you want to understand them properly, you have to go back to the authorities guiding the founding fathers, guiding especially Hamilton and Madison: Montesquieu, and so on and so on. You are led back eventually to classical antiquity.

Now a third meaning is indicated by the recollection of the fact that fifty years ago, I believe the general answer to what political theory is about would have been to say that it had to do with the state, the state understood as a sovereign state. The sovereign state, according to this doctrine, was distinguished from society. And a development took place there around 1900, which led to what is called pluralism, according to which the state is only one of many associations, each having a function of its own, but none of these associations can be said to be superior to[4] any other. So the state in particular cannot be said to be superior to the churches, trade unions, etc. This pluralistic doctrine questioned the crucial importance of the state, and even if we take the state proper, it is easy to observe, especially in a democracy, that its action is determined by the interplay of interest groups or groups of other sorts. Furthermore, there are movements opposed to the state, denying the importance of the state: anarchism, and to some extent communism. And yet these movements, anarchism and communism, are without any question political movements. So it seems that "political" is a wider term than "state," and therefore it was suggested that *the* theme should rather be the political than the state. So in other words, the state has lost this evidence which it had for quite some time, surely throughout the nineteenth century. Now one can of course also say political theory is sometimes meant to consist of overall reflections, comprehensive reflections, about policy in our age[5],

reflections more elaborated than they can be elaborated in an inaugural address, but as they find their expression to some extent within an inaugural address.

These are the views of political theory which one would discover on the basis of present-day usage. Did I omit any meaning of political theory with which you are familiar? Please tell me.

Now political philosophy, [as] I said before, has become incredible, implausible. In order to understand what that means, we have to formulate the objections to political philosophy. The simple argument which I stated earlier, which leads from the fact that every political action is concerned with better or worse, this simple reflection has no longer the plausibility which it has had for centuries. Now what are these objections to the possibility of political philosophy? The most powerful one can be stated as follows. All genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge, but philosophic knowledge is not scientific knowledge. Hence political philosophy is not genuine knowledge. I will elaborate this while I go. Let us first reflect upon the crucial part of this reasoning: all genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge. This view is called, and may be called, positivism, and we will first discuss that.

Now the founder of positivism, the originator of that term, is the French thinker of the early nineteenth century Auguste Comte. [LS writes on the blackboard.] And I will first present the Comtean position, which is by no means identical with the positivistic position as now prevailing, but we cannot understand the positivism of today without having first understood Comte. Now I will give you the titles of his chief works[6] as translated into English: *Course of Positive Philosophy*, six volumes from 1830 to 1842, and *System of Positive Politics*, 1851 to 1854. Auguste Comte was originally connected with Saint-Simon, one of these early socialists who were called by Marx and Engels the "utopian socialists," and there are quite a few things which Comte has in common with Saint-Simon.[i] But Comte ceased to be a socialist very early. Nevertheless, the similarity of his problem with the problem as seen by Marx is very great, as you will gradually see. Now the basis of Comte's doctrine is the well-known success of modern science since the time of Galileo and its ever[7]-spreading impact on modern society. In order to be enabled to form an independent judgment of what this success of modern science means, let us remember the most striking features of pre-Galilean science, traditional science, Aristotelian science. The simplest thing to do is to write here. [LS writes on the blackboard.] Now according to the Aristotelian scheme, philosophy or science—there is no distinction made—consists of two main parts. One is called theoretical and the other is called practical.[8] Each consists of three parts: [the theoretical consists of] mathematics, physics (which is used here in a wide sense to include all natural science), and metaphysics. Practical philosophy or science consists of three parts: ethics, economics, and politics. ("Economics" means here the management of the household or family, not what it has come to mean in modern times.) Now in Comte's scheme, the division of the sciences is as follows: mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and social physics, or sociology. These terms, ["sociology" and "social physics"], have been coined by Comte.[9] There is in addition a philosophy dealing with these various sciences, understanding the

[i] Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), social theorist and reformer, founder of French socialism.

meaning of mathematics, biology, sociology, etc., and this overall reflection on science and the sciences is what Comte calls positive philosophy.

Now what are the decisive differences between the Comtean [and the Aristotelian] schemes?[10] (The Comtean scheme is, by the way, the scheme now generally recognized, with minor additions: mathematics is a fundamental science, and so on, and social science is the last in the order of the sciences.) Now obviously in Comte's scheme there is no metaphysics. The second point, which[11] was no longer a question[12] for Comte at all, but which is in the light of history of immense importance, is this: that the natural sciences, or physics in the wide sense of the term,[13] [were] originally not metaphysically neutral. I mean by that [that] up to Galileo and Newton in the seventeenth century, a student of nature was either an Aristotelian, or a Platonist, or an Epicurean, or a Stoic. There was not *physics*, but Aristotelian, Platonic, Epicurean, Stoic physics. There were pursuits which were metaphysically neutral, where it did not make any difference whether you were a Platonist or an Epicurean: for example, shoemaking, to some extent also medicine, and also mathematics. But the epoch-making event was that the study of nature became as metaphysically neutral as shoemaking, medicine, and mathematics always more or less had been. The third point which I [will] mention right now is this: that what Aristotle calls practical science is here replaced by a theoretical science, sociology. Sociology is as theoretical as mathematics, physics, and chemistry. Every science according to Comte has its practical applications, naturally—mathematics, physics, chemistry—[and] so has sociology. But the science in itself, the science of man and [of] human affairs, is as theoretical as the other sciences. Therefore, for Aristotle, ethics—or let me speak more specifically of politics—political science is fundamentally independent of the natural sciences. I mean that it uses the natural sciences in a subsidiary fashion goes without saying, but in itself it is independent of the natural sciences. But in the Comtean scheme, sociology, the study of human society, is as much dependent on biology as biology is dependent on chemistry, and chemistry is dependent on physics, and physics is dependent on mathematics. That is a crucial difference, and this is of course very important for the understanding of what social science means today. It is no longer understood that a social scientist has had a very thorough training in mathematics, physics, and chemistry, but on the highest level of social science in the modern sense, this dependence on the preceding sciences (preceding in the order of the sciences) still is of crucial importance. Comte implies that *the* fundamental science, the science on which all others depend, is mathematics. Mathematics is the model; hence science formulates laws, equations, preferably in mathematical form.

Now[14] positive philosophy, the understanding of all intellectual activity[15] which has reached the level of science,[16] this one cannot do if one does not know its history. According to Comte, this is true of every conception: one cannot completely know a science without knowing its history, and this is impossible without studying, in a general way, the history of mankind. The broad result of Comte's study of the history of mankind is that it consists of three stages, of three successive philosophies, as he calls it, so much so that every science, say, mathematics or chemistry, goes through each of these three stages. The three stages are called by Comte the theological stage, the metaphysical stage, and the positive stage. "Positive" you can almost identify with "scientific," but I have to

use his terminology. At all times, man needs a philosophy for observing facts as well as a social bond. We cannot observe facts without selecting facts, and we must therefore have principles guiding our selection. To that extent,[17] a theory, a philosophy, precedes all observation. But we need also a philosophy, in the sense of Comte, as a social bond. Men cannot live together without an agreement regarding fundamentals, as others have put it. Now what are these three stages?

The first is the theological stage, in which man believes that he can answer the grandest questions and that he can exercise an unlimited control over the external world by substituting[18] [for] the things wills which he can influence. There are three stages of that, according to Comte, which he called fetishism, polytheism, and monotheism. In this early stage, which lasted way up to the present day, man believes[19] [he] know[s] the origin as well as the destiny of the universe. He claims to possess absolute knowledge, and he finds this absolute knowledge supplied by the assumption of supernatural, willing agents. Comte explains the primacy of the theological philosophy as follows: that man has a tendency to transport involuntarily the intimate sentiment of his own nature to the universal explanation of all phenomena whatsoever. The anthropocentric approach, in other words, is natural to man, and it finds its perfect expression in the theological stage.

The second stage is the metaphysical stage, in which the[20] willing beings, persons, are replaced by abstract forces, as he calls them, by personified abstractions. The highest stage of this is [that] in which Nature with a capital *N* is understood as the universal source of all phenomena. Another formula which he uses is that in the metaphysical stage, entity is substituted for divinity. These two stages take as their principles our immediate sentiments of human phenomena, our immediate sentiments of man, and hence they seek to explain the universe and all particulars in terms of will. Those who have any knowledge of what is called metaphysics may not recognize metaphysics at all in Comte's description, but let me say only this.[21] What he has in mind is a teleological analysis, say, in the form of Aristotle, that a being tends toward something. This of course is not a will in the beings, [say], as in a worm or any other being which tends toward the peak of its growth, but the very speaking of tendency implies thinking in terms of willing. That he has in mind.

The positive stage is characterized by the fact that its starting point is obviously not will, but numbers. The fundamental science is mathematics, and therewith any attempt to explain phenomena in terms of will is excluded. In the positive stage, man abandons the question of the origin and destiny of everything. It abandons the claim, or the aim, of absolute knowledge: only relative knowledge is possible. What does that mean? In the positive stage, man no longer asks for the Why but is only concerned with the How: how things operate, not why they operate in this manner. For example, there is no longer any speculation on the origin of life or the origin of the species, according to Comte. In this particular point Comte was obviously refuted by the later development of biology, to say nothing of Lamarck, who had already preceded him.[ii] But the fundamental thesis, that science is concerned with the How and not with the Why, has survived Comte up to the

[ii] Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744–1829), French naturalist and early proponent of the theory of evolution.

present day in many circles. Another example: Man is no longer concerned in the positive stage with whether inanimate and animate beings have or do not have the same or a different nature. This is according to Comte an insoluble question. In the positive stage, man studies the phenomena alone with a view to their laws, the invariable relations of succession and simultaneity. The type of this positive knowledge is this: given these and these conditions, this and this happens. This is not in Comte's view a statement about causes but about correlations: here are conditions, there are the things related, succeeding these conditions. Newton's laws of gravitation do not determine what attraction is in itself, what its cause is, but how attraction works. He says on one occasion [that] the question of the first causes of all motion, of all life, whatever it may be, or of the final causes, the last causes, is meaningless for us—a phrase which has recurred many times since.

Now the positive stage, which cannot be properly understood if one doesn't see it as succeeding the theological and the metaphysical stage[s], is the final stage in the development of the human mind. There is no possibility of visualizing anything radically different from the scientific approach which has come into being since the seventeenth century and has spread ever more. The victory of the positive spirit is inevitable, i.e., it has not yet been entirely victorious, especially not in the social sciences, but it is inevitable, for the human mind is powerfully disposed toward unity of method, and in the long run men will not leave it at proceeding in this very successful manner, say, in physics and chemistry, and proceeding in a radically different manner in the study of human affairs. For the time being, say, 1835 or thereabouts, the theological and metaphysical philosophy have still a certain practical superiority over the positive philosophy because they still can maintain the claim to universality, to answering all questions, while positive philosophy has achieved a breakthrough only in certain fields, say, physics and chemistry especially. But the human mind cannot but reach its true definitive maturity, the positive spirit, in all fields.

What makes Comte certain of the future victory of the positive spirit is the constant progress of the positive spirit from generation to generation, and the corresponding constant decline of the theological and metaphysical spirit. The most important lacuna as far as the positive spirit is concerned is the study of the social phenomena. This has surely not yet reached the positive stage—that does not yet exist for social science, in other words. And the external fact that Comte coined the term "sociology" is an indication of this state of affairs: sociology did not yet exist before Comte. Hitherto we do not yet have, as Comte says, a social physics, but only a social theology or a social metaphysics. And the examples which he gives are, for social theology,[22] the doctrine of the divine right of kings, which was of course still lingering on in continental Europe in the thirties of the last century, and[23] [for] social metaphysics, the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people. These are examples which may give you some initial guidance as to what he means by the distinction between theology and metaphysics: the doctrine of the divine right of kings, a theological doctrine; the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, a metaphysical doctrine.

Now while there can be no doubt regarding the intellectual superiority of the spirit of science and of science to all competitors, the positive spirit is not without its intrinsic dangers. The peculiar danger which is inherent in the victory of science is specialization. It becomes ever more necessary for men of science to be either physicists, or chemists, or whatever it may be. Where do we get that comprehensive view which, in however spurious a manner, the theological and metaphysical spirit supplied? Comte's answer is: We need a new kind of specialty, namely, a special study of science in general, of science as such and its relation to society. And that is what the positive philosophy of Comte is about. The social situation now is that the positive spirit, [the] scientific spirit, has destroyed the old certainties, i.e., the social bonds which hitherto kept society together. The consequence is anarchy, intellectual anarchy; the reconstruction is possible only through the application of the positive spirit to the social phenomena. For men need society requires the assent, [the] more or less conscious assent of all to a certain number of general ideas. These are no longer supplied by theology and cannot be supplied by metaphysics. The only way in which we can escape the anarchy caused by the destruction of the old certainties is that science supplies these certainties. We must see how he thinks of that.

The meaning of science is clearly indicated by the fact that the first of the sciences, the science par excellence, is mathematics. (By the way, what Comte says about mathematics is of course very much dated—there is no inkling of non-Euclidean geometry, for example—but within the limits of what could be known at the time, I find it very interesting and very clear, and I think very helpful; especially if one wants to understand or at least to get an inkling of the fundamental difference between modern mathematics, analytical geometry and calculus, in contradistinction to earlier, Greek mathematics, it is quite helpful.) Now "mathematics" meant in Greek originally the same as "science."[iii] According to Comte, mathematics is the science which aims at the measuring of magnitudes, a determining [of] unknown magnitudes through known magnitudes, according to precise relations which exist between them. This kind of precision cannot be expected in all sciences; hence science in general may be said to determine phenomena, unknown phenomena, by other phenomena according to relations which exist between these series of phenomena. Science is essentially destined to dispense, to the extent to which the various kinds of phenomena permit it, [24][with] every direct observation by permitting [one] to deduce from a small number of immediately given data the largest possible number of results, so that theoretical mechanics would be the model of science. Every question can in principle be conceived of as reducible to a pure question of numbers. Descartes has shown that all ideas of quality can be reduced to ideas of quantity. Think of colors and wavelengths, and such things. In fact, however, this is possible only for very simple phenomena; it is not possible for the subjects of biology and sociology. In these sciences dealing with more complex phenomena, there exists a fundamental impossibility of our ever obtaining true mathematical laws.

[iii] The word "*mathēmata*" (derived from *manthanō*, to learn) initially denoted the various branches of knowledge but came in postclassical ages to mean the mathematical disciplines specifically.

Yet this does not entitle us, according to Comte, to give up the notion that all phenomena are necessarily subject to mathematical laws, although we shall never be able to discover them in these large fields. The positive spirit in Comte's sense—does that not depend on the availability of mathematical laws in all spheres? It depends on the expectation of such laws. In a way, the positive spirit is as old as man himself. At all times men needed, in order to survive, relations between facts . . . at all times men had arts which are based on such knowledge of relationships between facts. Generally speaking, men must have a reasonable respect for, I quote, "the crude but judicious indications of vulgar common sense, the true and eternal starting point of all wise scientific speculations."[iv] In other words, common sense, prescientific understanding, is highly respectable because it is already, in a germinal way, scientific thinking. Now this importance of common sense applies especially to human affairs. Ordinary common sense is perfectly competent in regard to phenomena which by their nature are constantly submitted to its attentive consideration. A man dealing all his life with this kind of activity knows more about[25] [it] than a scientist as scientist who doesn't have the same familiarity can possibly know. All isolated study of the various social elements, which is the way in which it is handled by scientists as scientists, is in itself irrational and sterile. In this sphere, the sphere of social things, all understanding must start from the whole and not from the elements. For the demand that one must proceed from the simple to the complex, a demand which is in a way underlying Comte's whole scheme, from mathematics and physics to sociology, is not the primary demand of the scientific mind. The primary demand is that we proceed from the known to the unknown. But in sociology, in the study of society, the whole is the thing which is known, and the elements are those towards which we have to proceed by analysis. In the social sphere, the most vulgar phenomena are the most important ones, and therefore the procedure in sociology, to some extent even [in] biology, must be different from that of the mathematical sciences strictly understood. The positive spirit, we may say, is universalized common sense and therefore not in opposition to it. Comte hesitates to assert that this is due to the fact that there is an essential difference between man, the subject of sociology, and brutes, the subject of biology, to say nothing of inanimate things. According to Comte, there cannot be natures—a nature of man different from the nature of brutes—because this is metaphysics: intimate natures, as distinguished from phenomena and their manifest relations.

But Comte's consideration regarding the primacy of the whole in sociology goes very far to compensate for this tacit denial of essential differences. The fact that sociology, which means here the study of all social phenomena (it has a very broad meaning),[26] is not reducible to biology, etc., does not mean that it is not to some extent based on biology, for example. For instance, biology, especially anatomy and physiology, has to fulfill a most important function in regard to the intellectual government of society. Anatomy and physiology must protect common sense in its on the whole just appraisal of the various levels of intelligence against the metaphysical view that all human intelligences are fundamentally equal. Biology as he understood it (I do not have to go into the particular teachings he had in mind) made sure that the intellectual levels of different human beings are very great. The differences are very great, and therefore the belief in the equality of

[iv] Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, vol. 3 (Paris: Bachelier, 1838), 295. The translation here and in subsequent quotations from this work appears to be Strauss's.

men intellectually is a wrong assertion. Biology does fulfill here an important political or social function. [Or] also the overestimation of the merely acquired abilities as distinguished from the native abilities: this—and[27] he said without any irony—[this] error, the overestimation of the acquired abilities, is fostered by the scientists themselves, the majority of whom are men of very mediocre minds and therefore must put all their emphasis on their learning rather than on their native abilities.

Yet the dependence of sociology on the preceding sciences means more than that. It means the primacy of the nonsocial and the subsocial—generally speaking, of the lower. Accordingly, there is only a difference of degree between the human mind and the mind of the brutes. The scholastic definition of man as the rational animal is, according to Comte, nonsense: no higher animal could live without being rational to some extent. Ideology, which means in Comte's terminology the same as what is now called psychology, is a part of zoology. In other words, human psychology as such doesn't exist. In connection with this, Comte teaches the primacy of the passions in contradistinction to reason and intelligence. The passions are the primary motive power in human life, and so far from being dependent on intelligence or resulting from it, they are the powers which awaken intelligence and bring about its continuous development. The passions, not reason, determine the permanent goal of the intellect, and the lowest passions are the strongest. Does this strand, this important strand, in Comte's thought remind you of something? Yes?

Student: Hobbes.

LS: Yes, Hobbes especially, but quite a few men in between. In other words, if we generalize from that, the materialistic tradition of the seventeenth century, going through French materialism, is living on very powerfully in Comte. But the interesting thing is that Comte is no longer formally a materialist. That is the meaning, the important implication, of positivism. From the positivistic point of view, materialism as materialism is a metaphysical doctrine, and positivism is opposed to materialism as much as to spiritualism. Yet[28] it is surely an heir to the materialistic metaphysics.

Sociology is in a way the universal science. For all sciences must be understood in the light of a general theory of human development, of the development of the human mind. So you cannot understand mathematics in terms of numbers, because mathematics is not a number. Mathematics is a human pursuit, and this human pursuit can only be understood within the context of the development of the human mind, i.e., of the law of the three stages. Furthermore, the guidance of research and of discovery in all sciences requires a rational theory, and this rational theory is ultimately supplied by the needs of man, which needs of man can only be scientifically known by a science of man, by sociology. All sciences are the work of the human mind as social mind. From this point of view, sociology is the fundamental science.

Now the supremacy of the positive spirit means simply the obvious superiority of scientific explanations to theological or metaphysical explanations. This obvious supremacy of the positive spirit proves the necessity of a positive science of society—of

what, to repeat, Comte calls sociology or social physics. Why do we not yet have a social science? Why has not the positive spirit made itself the master of the study of social phenomena, as it has made itself the master in physics? Now in the first place, the logical order of the sciences, from mathematics, biophysics, and so on to sociology, is at the same time the temporal order of their emergence. Chemistry could not become a science, a positive science, before physics had[29] become a science. So only after biology has reached the scientific stage, which according to Comte was not the case before the end of the eighteenth century, could a social science become possible. More specifically, and more importantly, the phenomena most important for making social science possible did not yet exist before our time (our time meaning 1830 or thereabouts). Why? What is the most important phenomenon for making social science possible, that phenomenon which makes it possible to see society as a whole properly, truly? A society is in a way always a whole, but this is insufficient. The larger whole of which all societies are a part is the development of the human race, and the development of the human race finds its completion in the positive spirit and its social implications. And this did not yet exist before the reaction to the French Revolution was completed, according to Comte. Social science is not possible before the completion of the development within the elite of the human race in our times. Prior to our times, the essential direction of the social movement was not sufficiently determined, there was no certainty as regards the progressive character of the historical process.

Classical political philosophy, that of Plato and Aristotle, coincided with the state of decline of ancient society. The notion of a more perfect state of things replacing a less perfect one, i.e., of progress, is due to Christianity, according to Comte: the distinction between the new law, the perfect new law, in contradistinction with the less perfect old law. Forerunners of the positive social science, according to Comte, are especially three men: Aristotle, whom he highly respects; Montesquieu; and Condorcet—you know, the victim of the French Revolution.[30] Those of you who know Montesquieu, Aristotle, and Condorcet, at least to some extent, will be quite surprised by this combination because one can see that someone admires Aristotle and Montesquieu because of the very solid empirical character of their studies, which of course Comte means too, but Condorcet is very far remote from that. Later on it will be clear to you why he makes this peculiar selection. But he has also a certain respect for the political economists, especially Adam Smith, and the historical school of jurisprudence in Germany.

Prior to the French Revolution and the reaction to it, it was impossible to see that the history of the human race is a whole, has a physiognomy of its own, and this is its progressive character. And that insight makes social science possible; therefore there could be no social science before. Social science is necessary now, not only theoretically, in order to round off the whole of science, but above all practically. Public morality needs a solid basis, and practical politics needs reliable guidance, a vision of the future. This indispensable agreement regarding the fundamentals can now, after the decay of theological and metaphysical thought, be supplied only by science. As it is, there is intellectual anarchy, and the intellectual anarchy is the root of the moral anarchy, which in its turn is the root of the political anarchy. At present there are no established principles regarding which all members of society can be united. Human reason needs

above all fixed points, which alone are susceptible to rally in a useful way its spontaneous efforts, and for which the skepticism momentarily produced by the more or less difficult passage from one dogmatism to the other constitutes a sort of morbid perturbation which cannot be prolonged without grave dangers.

In other words, there was a dogmatism in the past: religious dogmatism. This was destroyed by the revolutionary critical philosophy, and there will be no order, no stability, before there is[31] a new dogmatism, and this new dogmatism can only be based on science, because science is the only intellectual power anymore which commands universal respect. This means—Comte doesn't hesitate to draw the conclusion from that—there cannot be universal toleration. Universal toleration for every opinion is defensible as a transitional thing, for the pulling down of the untenable old views and institutions so that room is created for the emergence of the new and final, but not in the elementary stage. Systematic tolerance cannot exist, and has never really existed, except regarding opinions regarded as indifferent or questionable, as is proven by the very practice of revolutionary politics in spite of its absolute proclamation of the freedom of conscience . . . [v] itself guaranteed in the last analysis by a kind of religious consecration, real, if vague[32], without which these metaphysical dogmas would necessarily be exposed to a continuous discussion, which would compromise much the efficacy of these dogmas.

He speaks in another context of the fundamental dogma of free examination and of the dogma of equality in order to indicate that the revolutionary position which he attacks is itself based on unquestionable premises without which the revolutionary position would be as little possible as any other political position. The root of the present anarchy in morals and politics is, to repeat, intellectual anarchy. Now how can Comte diagnose the situation prevailing in his time as chaotic or anarchic? He must have some notion of order, and not really a fantastic notion which may not have any solidity, but of an order which is surely possible. Comte indeed takes it for granted that there was once an order: intellectual order, hence moral, hence political, and this existed in the Middle Ages. According to Comte, Catholicism is the most noble work of the theological spirit. But since it is based on theology, i.e., on untruth, it must be rejected, to say nothing of the fact that it has lost its social power to a considerable extent. In addition, it is already undermined by the critical revolutionary philosophy of the Enlightenment, which according to Comte stems from Protestantism, from the Protestant principle of free examination. Theological politics is no longer compatible with society and is forced into one compromise with secularized society after another. Metaphysical politics, on the other hand, let us say Rousseau (because Comte thinks of Rousseau probably more than of anybody else), is good only for pulling down, not for reconstruction. The final superiority of positive philosophy is undeniable, as our discussion of its own development will show.

"To the positive philosophy alone it belongs, in the realized state of human reason, to develop in us, within our most daring enterprises, an unshakeable vigor and a reflective constancy drawn directly from our own nature, without any external assistance and

[v] It is likely that the tape was changed at this point.

without any chimerical impediment.[vi] The propriety to unite as well as to stimulate and direct belongs from now on in an ever more exclusive manner, since the decay of religious beliefs, to the whole of positive conceptions, which alone are today capable of establishing[vii] spontaneously, from one end of the world to the other, on bases as durable as extended, a true intellectual community which can serve as a solid foundation to the vastest political organization."[viii]

This is the practical significance of the positive philosophy. There is then an obvious need for the new order, and this new order is understood as the final order. It is final for the simple reason that science is the final philosophy—modern science. The new order will come inevitably; its power is based on the power of science, which destroyed the alternatives. The new order, we may say, is the order in accordance[33] [with] nature, and especially in accordance[34] [with] the nature of the elite of the human race.

There is some difficulty in the argument which I would like to read to you.

"The elite of the human race, as the necessary and final result of all the diverse earlier evolutions, touches now at the direct coming of the social order best adapted to its nature.[ix] The theologic[al] and metaphysical philosophy have alone really undertaken hitherto to operate the political reorganization of modern societies;[x] and their having failed, it follows evidently either that the problem would not be susceptible of any solution, which it would be absurd to think, or we have to have recourse to positive philosophy."[xi]

Comte does not consider it possible that there might be a problem which cannot be solved by any philosophy, philosophy in his sense of the term. In the new order, men will be guided by a small elite (that is implied in everything I said before), and these men are the men devoted by nature to contemplation. In a very strange, not to say fantastic way, Comte has dared to demand and even to predict the rule of philosophers in the nineteenth century, the imminent rule of philosophers, but these philosophers being now modern scientists. One can say Comte has been refuted a hundred times by the development which has taken place, and as a predictor he surely is subject to refutation by further developments, but this doesn't mean that his suggestions are not of the utmost importance for us to consider. There is a thing which comes up time and again and which is something very actual in our society, although not preponderant, what is called technocracy. Our society requires to some extent rule by experts, which means rule by scientific experts. No one has stated the argument in favor of this possibility and half-necessity as strongly as Comte. There are a few passages regarding this Platonism which it might be good to read.

[vi] Strauss here passes over in silence a part of this selection from Comte.
[vii] Strauss says "to establish."
[viii] Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, vol. 4 (Paris: Bachelier, 1839), 690–91.
[ix] Strauss here omits a part of the quoted material.
[x] Here again some of the quoted material is omitted.
[xi] Comte, *Cours*, vol. 4, 173–74.

"Every individual, however inferior, has always the natural right, provided he does not behave in a pronouncedly antisocial manner, to expect from all others the scrupulous accomplishment of the general considerations following from the dignity of man.[xii] But in spite of this great moral obligation, which has never been directly denied since the abolition of slavery, it is evident that men are not equal among themselves nor even equivalent; and hence could not possess in society identical right, apart of course from the fundamental right necessarily common to all, of the free and normal development of personal activity.[xiii] The continuous progress of civilization, far from bringing us closer to a chimerical equality, tends on the contrary by its nature to develop extremely these fundamental inequalities."[xiv]

And this is at the bottom of the fact that there must be a government by the simply superior people, and these are of course those who are not mediocre: scientists. We can say (although Comte never would use such a phrase) it's the rule of the philosophers; that is the only way out. And to repeat, for Comte this is not, as it is at most in Plato, a wish, a pious wish, but something which he can predict because there is no other solution to the social problem, and the social problem *must* have a solution. It would be absurd to think that it could not have a solution, as we have seen.

Let us now turn to some details of Comte's sociology, of his positive political philosophy, as he also calls it—he still speaks of political philosophy as a matter of course. I see it is rather late, and that this would lead us much beyond the time. I propose therefore that we use the remaining few minutes for discussion. There must be some—yes?

Student: Earlier you said that Comte favors the passions over reason—

LS: Favors? When did I say—

Same Student: Not favors, excuse me, not favors. The passions are—

LS: Are primary and strong.

Same Student: Also, this is reminiscent of materialism, but not formally materialism, because he denies the possibility of metaphysics. And my question is: On what ground does he claim the primacy of the passions, and if these aren't metaphysical grounds, what are they?

LS: He would say: observation. The study of men, individual men, will always show that apart from very rare exceptions, due to particular circumstances, men are more passionate—passion in the wide sense. I mean of course not only noble passions, passions of any other kind than rational.

[xii] Some lines are omitted from the quotation.
[xiii] Strauss omits lines from this passage.
[xiv] Comte, *Cours*, vol. 4, 63–64.

Same Student: Then you're saying that Comte would consider it a sufficient argument that an overwhelming percentage of people did something—

LS: No, not quite. I mean, there is one point into which I didn't wish to go because it would really lead us afar.[35] Regarding biology, he thinks very highly of one writer of the early nineteenth century called Gall, the founder of a thing called phrenology, the study of the brain.[xv] He was in a way a very materialistic man, believing he had found the locus of each mental activity in a special part of the brain.[36] I've forgotten now where he localized passion and where he localized reason, and what [is] the bulk of the passionate part of the brain compared with the bulk of the rational part of the brain, if one may say so. These things do play a great role in Comte.

But still I would say this. This view of the preponderant power of passion in the majority of men was rather a common view. I mean, Plato and Aristotle wouldn't say anything different about it, only the *possibility* of truly rational men was more important for Plato and Aristotle than it was for Hobbes. This is, I think, the different point. I mean, what is your—in other words, you think that this is not sufficiently established in a scientific manner, according to the notion of science which he has, yet to which Comte would reply that common sense is not so untrustworthy in these matters as it is according to the now prevailing view of science. Today such assertions would be questioned by scientists if they have not been properly established by what is called scientific methods. This was not Comte's view. Comte thought that in matters of such grave importance for men, the ordinary experience of men throughout the ages is quite trustworthy, and he would contend that this general experience of men throughout the ages confirms that: that men who are rational are an exception rather than the rule. And of course Comte wants these men, these rare men, to be the rulers. [37]He doesn't draw the conclusion [that] since passion is more powerful, it should not be controlled. It must be controlled—the details of how he visualizes this control I will discuss next time—because if there were not a partial control of passion by passion, reason couldn't do very much. You know? This was already a great theme of people like Hobbes, that the passions counteracting each other creates a possibility for reason to throw its weight on the right side, and therefore reason doesn't have to be so powerful in itself. Yes?

Student: Mr. Strauss, is there any significant relation between the positivism of Comte and the ideology of de Tracy?[xvi]

LS: Yes, there is, but Comte rejects that. I mean, what is Tracy?[38] There was a school at the end of the eighteenth century in France, Napoleonic times, which continued more or less what Locke had done in England, and today what they did would be called psychology. This school called itself ideologic, for this reason: because, as you know from Locke, the subject matter of Locke is ideas, the ideas in the human mind. And the study of these ideas is therefore ideology. And Napoleon, who detested these men

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[xv] Franz Josef Gall (1758–1828), German neuroanatomist and physiologist, pioneer in cranioscopy or phrenology.

[xvi] Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836), French materialist philosopher credited with having coined the term "ideology."

because they were republicans, used the word "ideology" in order to show how incredibly stupid they were. And from this Napoleonic usage of "ideology," the Marxian usage is derived. Then it came to mean, from Marx on, a *wrong* theory, a theory which is based on a fundamentally wrong perspective, ultimately due to class . . . this is a meaning which it took on in Marx and was then taken over by half-Marxists and by non-Marxists, and now it is a perfectly respectable term, so much so that Khrushchev, for example, and, as I was told, even Stalin himself, has spoken of "the Marxist ideology." Imagine! [Laughter] But . . . otherwise sensible people shout for an ideology: they want to have an ideology, by which they mean, I suppose, [that] they want to have a coherent body of doctrine which guides them in their actions, and they call it an ideology. But an ideology has . . . I would regard the authority of Marx as absolutely decisive: an ideology is a *wrong doctrine*. One shouldn't really speak of it except under great provocation or pressure. Someone else? Yes?

Student: Would you clarify please why the reaction to the French Revolution, rather than the French Revolution—

LS: Because the French Revolution led to this thing called the Terror, don't forget that. In 1793, Robespierre. And of course they got rid of Robespierre eventually, but until some order came out of it—it took Napoleon, and Napoleon is surely a reaction to the French Revolution. But still, Comte detests Napoleon because he detests the military spirit (I will take this up later), and therefore the character of the postrevolutionary society became visible only partly under Napoleon, and partly even after the defeat of Napoleon—very briefly, the industrial society. That is the point towards which Comte is working. The two powers now determining the world are science and industry. By the way, the two names are combined in the designation of the museum very close to this university:[xvii] science and industry, the idea being [that] the alternative is religion and war. This is the perspective. You see here the kinship with Marx, which kinship can be explained by a common ancestry because Saint-Simon, the original teacher of Comte, was in a way also a teacher of Marx. But Comte turned away entirely from all socialism, and Comte believed that the nerve of the whole historical development is the human mind, the intellect, and not the relations of production at all. This is radical.

Student: Mr. Strauss, may I ask: you said something about Comte's relationship to Euclidean geometry and modern mathematics, as opposed to Cartesian—

LS: No, I mean the difference between classical mathematics—also mechanics, say in Archimedes—and this radically new point in the seventeenth century, especially Descartes's analytical geometry and Leibniz, with his calculus.

Same Student: Comte accepted the latter as the . . .

LS: Of course, the modern assertion naturally is that the ancient was only an inadequate form of mathematics. Surely[39] what he understands by the positive spirit, by the scientific spirit, is the spirit of modern science, which was prepared to some extent by Euclid. Yes?

[xvii] The Museum of Science and Industry, near the University of Chicago campus.

Same Student: Could you be, if you think it's necessary, a bit more explicit on the nature of these technocrats in the final stage?

LS: Well, I will speak of that later. But regarding mathematics, one can use this simple thing: premodern mathematics, at least in the Western world, did not know of algebra.[40] In other words, they could reckon only with numbers, not with these strangely generalized numbers . . . Yes?

Student: I wonder if you could tell me what was Comte's view about human nature, in this sense: you mentioned that in the transition from the second to the third stage, from the metaphysical to the positivistic, an intellectual anarchy occurs, in the sense of the old orders being destroyed, and no longer are people asking *why*-questions, they are now asking *how*-questions.

LS: Well, this is not quite correct. The chaos, the anarchy, is not during the transition from the metaphysical to the positive but is coeval with the metaphysical period. The metaphysical philosophy is the negative, critical, skeptical, destructive thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[41] In the seventeenth century, the power of religion and of the old authorities was still relatively unbroken, and the situation has progressed and has become unbearable only in the nineteenth century. But the theories there, from Hobbes to Rousseau—he doesn't mention names very frequently. Rousseau he simply calls a sophist; I mean, he belongs to these people. But I haven't found the reference to Hobbes or to Locke, but I'm sure he also meant them too.

Same Student: The question that I really wanted to ask was, in the last stage, when science becomes the last philosophy, does he now see the human being as no longer being concerned with moral questions?

LS: Yes, *of course* he's concerned, but these questions will be answered by science now.

Same Student: Is science the new moral authority?

LS: Sure! Oh, yes, naturally. I mean, you see here the most powerful difference between Comtean positivism and present-day positivism. In present-day positivism, science is silent about all moral questions. In other words, science can supply material with which moral men as moral men can answer their questions, but science as such does not answer the questions. You know this familiarly. This is completely absent from Comte. For Comte, science is an intrinsically moral affair. This creates certain theoretical difficulties for Comte, by the way, which are avoided by present-day positivism, but present-day positivism has some other difficulties instead. Did I answer your question?

Same Student: Yes.

LS: Mr. Landon.

Student: Earlier you explained the independence of the practical sciences from the theoretical sciences in Aristotle's scheme. Yet, as I recall, and I hope I'm recalling accurately, in your introduction to *Natural Right and History*, after talking about certain political matters, you said that the answers to the highest questions were ultimately involved in the method . . . whether it was teleological or mechanistic. And I think the footnote is from the *Physics*—[xviii]

LS: Yes. Well, I do not remember the quotation exactly, I remember the thought. In other words, the question is whether the distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge is theoretically adequate. It is practically good enough, but theoretically perhaps not good enough. That would be a question. Could this not be that something is practically good enough and theoretically in need of clarification? I think that is so.

Let me say these words from the Aristotelian point of view. There are principles of practice which are not in need of theoretical justification in order to be evident to us. But they can be obscured by false theories. Now then,[42] in order to fight a false theory, you need a theory. You need therefore a theory to defend sound practice and its principles against false theories. Now is this theory—let us say, this apologetic theory—a theory like theories simply, say, astronomical theories, or is it not of a peculiar character, because of its apologetic[43] [character]? These are questions into which one . . . I think I will leave it at that.

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[20] Deleted "willing, acting beings."
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[xviii] *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 8n.

[29] Deleted “not.”
[30] Deleted “Condorcet.”
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[40] Deleted “And algebra is.”
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[42] Deleted “you need.”
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Session 2: January 11, 1965

Comte's Political Philosophy

Leo Strauss: [In progress] . . . used here includes just. To take a simple example today, reapportionment on the basis of "one man, one vote" is based on the opinion that "one man, one vote" alone is just. Now despite that prima facie evidence of political philosophy, political philosophy has become incredible, implausible today, and this is due in the first place to the view now prevailing, that the only kind of genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge. This view is called positivism.

Positivism was founded by Auguste Comte. I spoke last time of his central teaching, the law of the three stages: theological, metaphysical, and positive or scientific. The positive stage is the highest and the final stage in the development of the human mind. One cannot understand the scientific spirit if one does not understand the fundamental and typical obstacles to it, and these obstacles are precisely the theological and the metaphysical spirit. Comte, in contradistinction to present-day positivism, still holds the view that commonsense knowledge is genuine knowledge, so that scientific knowledge is only universalized commonsense knowledge. And Comte still calls the scientific study of social phenomena—what he was the first to call sociology or social physics—he still calls that political philosophy.

Now sociology in Comte's sense depends on the sciences preceding it, in the first place, biology, then chemistry, physics, and ultimately mathematics. Yet sociology does not depend completely on the preceding sciences. It has a subject matter of its own which is not reducible to that of biology, etc. Yet on the other hand, there is no essential difference between the social and the presocial, or nonsocial: more generally stated, between the human and the nonhuman. Psychology—in the language of Comte, "ideology"—is a part of zoology simply. Society consists of men, and man is the subject of biology, yet society is a whole of which men are parts. This whole is something which escapes biology as biology. So there is a certain obscurity as to the possibility of reducing the more complex phenomena to the more simple phenomena.

We must go a step further. Sociology is not only to some extent independent of the preceding sciences; it is in a way even the science of sciences, the universal science. For all sciences are the work of the human mind as social mind, and therefore the clarification of science as such is a part, perhaps the most important part, of sociology in Comte's sense. I have spoken also of what Comte teaches regarding the practical necessity of sociology. He starts from the prevailing intellectual anarchy: there is no agreement regarding fundamentals. This is due to the dissolution of the theological spirit, and that dissolution is the work of the metaphysical or revolutionary spirit, i.e., of the philosophies of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. The intellectual anarchy necessarily leads to moral anarchy, which in its turn leads to political anarchy. Man is in a transitional stage between an order, the order of the Middle Ages, and a new

order which will be the final order, and this new order can be brought about only by the consistent application of the scientific or positive spirit, by the extension of the scientific spirit to the social phenomena. In other words, science has to take over the function which theology had in the Middle Ages. The new order will be brought about by the unqualified rule of science, which means the rule of scientists. He doesn't mean the rule of any mediocre scientists; he means the rule of the most outstanding, most comprehensive scientists, whom he still calls philosophers. So what Comte demands is the rule of philosophers, but of course of positive philosophers, not of metaphysicians, who are responsible in a way for the present intellectual chaos. This much to remind you of what I [will] discuss today. Before I go on, I would like to know whether there is any point of those just made which you would like clarified.

Student: Last time you referred to modern physics, modern science, as being metaphysically neutral. And I don't understand what that means. How can physics be considered today metaphysically neutral? It strikes me that their metaphysics, although usually undeveloped, would be more Epicurean than—

LS: Yes, but talk to any physicist or to any theorist of physics, and he would deny that. He would simply say that while modern physics emerged originally from the so-called molecular philosophy, which is Epicureanism or Democriteanism, this has long ceased to be the essence of physics. That is of course a question, but I stated only that modern science, according to the interpretation which it has of itself, is metaphysically neutral. Whether one can leave it at that is a long question. Now let us turn—yes?

Student: When you say [that] every scientist takes from the preceding ones, do you mean anything more than that one accepts the results of the preceding ones?

LS: At least this, but also the training acquired by the use of these methods is essential for the later sciences. In other words, what Comte thinks is that a chemist, for example, must be thoroughly trained in mathematics, and the same would be true of course also of the biologist and of the sociologist. If this were not so, then the preceding sciences would be mere authorities and not truly understood. He wants more than that, than to simply say that my colleague in the other department [has proved that], Joe has done it and we don't have to bother about that. It is a bit more.

Now let us turn to Comte's notion of positive political philosophy, which is the same as sociology or social physics. Sociology consists of social statics and social dynamics. You see here the connection with physics. Social statics deals equally with all societies, i.e., with the conditions of existence common to all societies, and the corresponding rules of harmony in regard to, first, the individual; second, the family; and third, society properly so called. The notion of society properly so called, when it has reached its entire scientific extension, tends to embrace the whole of the human species, i.e., it is no longer a national society, and principally of "the white race." Now why does he make this strange—in our opinion strange—qualification or limitation to the white race? I think there is no inconsistency in that, because in Comte's time the positive spirit was still a preserve of the Western world, which extended only later to the East and to Africa, and

so on. The separate treatment of the individual in social statics does not mean that the individual precedes society. Man's fundamental sociability is undeniable; there never was a state of nature in the sense of Hobbes, Locke, or Rousseau.

Now regarding the individual, we must observe the preponderance of the lowest and most egoistic instincts over our social instincts. Our social instincts are weaker than our egoistic instincts. Hence the primacy of the egoistic instincts must clearly be seen; hence the notion of the common good or, as he says, of the public interest has no intelligible sense without that of the particular interest in the first place. We cannot understand the common good if we do not understand first the private good, and here Comte admires the wisdom of the biblical command "Love thy neighbor like thyself." The personal instinct, as he puts it, self-love, must serve as guide to the social instinct, love of others. The strengthening of man's benevolence, which is primarily so weak, is due to the growth of his intelligence. Intelligence weakens his passions, and man achieves greater clarity about his social relations. He sees more and more that his private interests cannot be furthered without due consideration for the interests of others, for the common interest.

Now in Comte's age people began to speak of conservative and progressive people. You know this is now a very popular distinction, but it doesn't antedate the early nineteenth century. Now the conservative spirit according to Comte is inspired above all by the purely personal instinct, by selfishness—vested interests, as it came to be called later; and the spirit of improvement, the progressive spirit, is inspired by the spontaneous combination of intellectual activity with the social instinct. In other words,[1] the intellectuals are progressive (a thesis which is now extremely popular, as you know, and here we have one early indication of it) because the intelligence strengthens the social interests, the interest in the common good, the progressiveness. Comte has abandoned the notion of the state of nature, as we have seen. He has not entirely abandoned the notion of natural right. There is indeed no necessary connection between the state of nature and the natural right. He says: Every individual has always the natural right, unless he has behaved antisocially in a very pronounced way, to expect from all others the scrupulous and continuous fulfillment of the general regards due to the dignity of man.[i] This much about the individual. Now we turn to the question of the family.

According to Comte, the family is the school of sociability. And the main reason for this is that every society presupposes some inequalities, and the family is characterized by two fundamental inequalities: that of husband and wife, and that of parents and children. And so here we learn, so to say, the rudiments of living together by living on the basis of these fundamental inequalities. I [will] read to you a few passages to show you how conservative Comte was compared with his present-day successors.

"Doubtless the institution of marriage suffers necessarily, as all other institutions, spontaneous modifications through the gradual course of human evolution. Modern marriage, as Catholicism has finally constituted it, differs radically from Roman

[i] A slightly different translation of the text is quoted on page 13.

marriage, just as Roman marriage differed from Greek marriage and both of them from Egyptian or Oriental marriage, even after the establishment of monogamy."[ii]

"However great one may suppose these spontaneous changes [from the Oriental marriage to present-day monogamous marriage as understood by Catholicism—LS] they all rest constantly uniform with[iii] the invariable fundamental spirit of the institution, which alone is here our primary subject. Now this spirit of marriage consists always in this inevitable natural subordination of the wife towards the husband, which is always reproduced in all the changes."[iv]

And this is proven, according to Comte . . . not only historically, but more directly by biology.

"Positive biology [i.e., scientific biology—LS] tends to represent the female sex, especially in our species [because in other animals it may be different—LS] as necessarily constituted, compared to the male, in a sort of continuous infancy, which removes her, especially in the most important respects, from the ideal type of the race.[v] [So in other words, science proves that women cannot reach the level of men.—LS] One cannot seriously doubt today, merely on the basis of biology, the evident relative inferiority of the woman, who is much less capable than man, to the indispensable continuity as well as to the high intensity of mental work either by virtue of the smaller intrinsic power of her intelligence or because of her more lifeless moral and physical susceptibility which is so opposed to every obstruction and every concentrated scientific work."[vi]

And all history shows that. And especially women are wholly unfit for government. He goes much beyond the tradition because the tradition generally said [that] for government, women can be quite good. Proof: Queen Elizabeth I, Empress Catherine, and some others. But only the question regarding science. But I read this to you more in order to show you how very conservative Comte, in spite of his profession, is.

Now the third and most important subject: society strictly understood. Society consists of families, not of individuals. This is a clear return to the older view against the view of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, where society is based on a contract between the individuals and not on family. What is characteristic of society at large is the invariable reconciliation of the separation of work, the division of labor, with cooperation. Division and yet cooperation. Individuals of very great intellectual and moral differences work together without an organization or a plan: "spontaneously," as he calls it. The principle of society is the division of labor, which leads naturally to cooperation, implies cooperation. And this is the crucial difference between[2] society and the family: the family is characterized by social affections—love, parents and children, husband and wife, and

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[ii] Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, vol. 4 (Paris: Bachelier, 1839), 566.
[iii] Strauss says they nevertheless constantly "conform to."
[iv] Comte, *Cours*, vol. 4, 568–69.
[v] Comte, *Cours*, 570.
[vi] Comte, *Cours*, 571.

vice versa. But love is of no importance in society, where solidarity is supplied by the necessary consequence of the division of labor, that they have to work together.

The division of labor, and hence cooperation, also explains or justifies the multiplicity of nations. Each nation makes its contribution to the one work of mankind. The division of labor constitutes principally social solidarity. Social organization tends ever more to divide labor: the more society progresses, the greater will be the division of labor. And this takes place in accordance with the characteristics of each individual. Everyone gets that parcel of social labor for which he is best fitted. Some of you may remember the beginning of the discussion in Plato's *Republic* book 2, when he describes the division of labor, and where everyone gets that job for which he is by nature fitted.[vii] But Comte is not as strict as Plato: he says the division of labor [is] in accordance with the characteristics of each individual, regardless of whether these characteristics are natural, i.e., congenital, or due to the education received in social position. In other words, here the problem of justice arises but is not faced by Comte. I mean, whether there is, say, someone who is congenitally very gifted, naturally very gifted but does not receive the proper education because of his social position—whether that is fair that he remains at the bottom of the social ladder. The division of labor even produces differences both intellectual and moral among the individuals. In other words, these are not merely the natural inequalities there; these natural inequalities are increased through the division of labor. If someone works all the time intellectually, his intellect is, as a natural result, superior to the intellect of one whose intellect is never used or hardly used.

Since through the division of labor each has a very restricted sphere, say, making some part of some machine, he doesn't see clearly the relation of his private interest (his wages), or maybe even his class interest, to the public interest. So a certain atomization of society takes place. There arises therefore the need for permanent social discipline, that is to say, for government. Government is necessary because society is necessarily divisive. Social progress is due to society, but government renders possible society. Comte comes here very close to the view, say, of Thomas Paine: the true and good thing is society, and government has only a necessary but marginal function. Yet, as you will see immediately, Comte differs very radically from Paine and his like. For the action of the government is not merely, as he puts it, material, by which he means coercive (the police), but also and above all intellectual and moral. For government stands for the spirit of the whole, whereas society is characterized by the division of labor. More precisely, the division of labor leads to the consequence that the more specialized kinds of labor place themselves spontaneously, naturally, under the continuous direction of those of greater generality. That is to say, there is a natural hierarchy: the simple worker who does this kind of very limited work has a foreman, and so on and so on, and this hierarchy emerges without any planning, by the nature of things. This fact increases, of course, the intellectual and moral inequality. That doesn't mean that the men at the bottom of the ladder are immoral, but simply[3] that quite a few moral potentialities are not actualized there which are actualized on the higher level. More intellectual and moral qualities are needed at the top than at the bottom. Every human society tends then toward a spontaneous government. This tendency is in harmony with another natural phenomenon, namely, that some individuals

[vii] *Republic* 369e ff.

are by nature inclined to command, and others to obey or to follow. Nature is so kind, we can say, as to provide for this distinction. Yet we have to consider that there is a need for two kinds of government.

In the first place, we need a government which vouches for the preponderance of a certain system of common opinions. There is a need for the permanent existence of a speculative class—in other words, for the continuous division between theory and practice—a privileged class which enjoys physical leisure, indispensable for the culture of the intellect. And the function of this speculative class is to organize opinion and education in the largest sense of the word, i.e., not merely what is going on in schools. Its function is limited to moral influence, i.e., these intellectual rulers, who as we know are the scientists, are excluded from political power. The medieval separation between church and state, or rather between the power spiritual and power temporal, is a not quite perfect model for Comte. Spiritual government, the government of the scientists (or we could say intellectuals, if we understand by "intellectual" a man of science) . . . [viii] has also the function to approve and disapprove of the public and private life of temporal government. In other words, a power of censorship, which however has of itself no direct political effect. The temporal government was originally of a military kind, [and] now it must be industrial, peaceful. The temporal government will naturally consist of the captains of industry and banking. "Captain," we remember, is originally a military title, which shows a connection. At the top there would be a dictatorship of three bankers, not elected but named by their predecessors, but checked by the freedom of the press and public opinion in general,[4] the idea being that public opinion is formed by the wisest members of the society, these men of science.

Now the need of a power spiritual is connected with the fact that no society is possible without religion, according to Comte. But Comte, being a positivist, can of course not have a religion with God, it must be a religion without God. Now, that which at that time might have seemed to be very paradoxical has in the meantime become a very popular notion. I read an article, for example, by one of the present-day positivists, that a scientist who is absolutely unbelieving is religious because of his dedication to science. This is not quite Comte's view. The object of worship of[5] [Comte's] religion is the human race: a religion of humanity, a religion which consists in the worship of humanity and especially of the great benefactors of the human race. Now this is in agreement with Comte's moral teaching: morality according to Comte consists in altruism, living for others, *vivre pour autrui*. This does not mean to exclude self-love, as we have seen, because Comte accepts the biblical command "Love thy neighbor like thyself." And it is also not merely love of the present generation but of the future ones as well. This morality is very stern: it demands severe self-control. Man has no right to do what he pleases. A life of self-indulgence and mere amusement is impossible. Every citizen, high or low, must regard himself as a public functionary. Intellectual power, no less than the power of wealth, needs moral control. The mind, the intellect, must be subordinated to the heart. So in other words, these scientists, as rulers, are supposed to be permeated by the highest morality. They are not mere technocrats.

[viii] The tape was changed at this point.

I have switched more than once from Comte's social statics to his social dynamics, because the social dynamics is the authoritative and the fundamental part of Comte's teaching. The chief contents of Comte's new political philosophy as a whole is the law of the three stages, and this belongs to social dynamics, the changes that society has undergone in the course of time. More generally stated, the chief teaching of Comte's political philosophy is to the effect that the whole development of the human race constitutes a progress, that is to say, an ever-increasing power of the characteristic faculties of humanity, as distinguished from animality, of our most noble inclinations and our most generous sentiments. The conditions of progress are in the first place the continuous renovation of the ages of the social movement, that is to say, the death of the individuals—if this would not take place, rigidity would set in—and secondly, the progressive increase in numbers. Progress requires large population centers throughout history. Comte faces for a moment the possibility of overpopulation in the future but doesn't see it as an imminent danger. The core of progress, however, is intellectual progress. [The] history of society is dominated by the history of the human mind, and the history of the human mind—intellectual history, history of philosophy—is the key to all history. Now history of philosophy does [not] of course[6] mean philosophy as an[7] academic field in any sense. Philosophy is the overall view which man necessarily has, whether it is theological, metaphysical, or positive. The change from military societies, feudal societies, to industrial societies is a consequence of the changes in philosophy, i.e., in *Weltanschauung*, in ways of thinking.

The military regime had always as its indispensable political base the individual slavery of the producers, so that the warriors had the free and full development of their characteristic activity. This institution of slavery was of crucial importance because the slaves, the producers, were the forerunners of the men of the industrial society because of the nonwarlike and productive character of the work. Now another point. No military regime could have established itself and, especially, lasted except by being based on a sufficient theological consecration without which the intimate subordination which it demands would never have been possible. Without this intimate correlation to the theological spirit, it is evident that the military spirit could never have fulfilled the highest social destination which it had for the development of the human race. In other words, the military spirit required the theological spirit, was based on it, and therefore the fundamental thing is the theological spirit, not the military spirit, and the whole history of the human race is intellectual history.

Now for the better understanding of Comte's new political philosophy, we shall consider at somewhat greater length his critique of what he calls metaphysical politics, in contradistinction to his critique of theological politics. This, for the following reason: metaphysical politics at least claims to be based on man's natural faculties alone, whereas theological politics claims to be based on divine revelation. But above all, metaphysical politics was not sociology, whereas positive political philosophy is sociology. What was the fundamental error of that political philosophy which was not sociology? In other words, what was the fundamental error of all political philosophy proper?

This question is answered by Comte's criticism of metaphysical politics. Generally speaking, Comte identifies metaphysical political philosophy with that of the modern age, sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. But on at least one occasion he identifies metaphysical politics with medieval thought. Metaphysical political philosophy is legalistic political philosophy. He probably thinks of the importance of the idea of natural law in both the Middle Ages and in modern times. But this is not the decisive point in Comte. Metaphysical politics appeals directly to all intelligences on whatever level, i.e., no training, scientific training, is required as you must have in order to be a chemist or a biologist. The various social questions were subjects of simple inspiration, and this simple inspiration you can have without any labor and even without any native gifts. In other words, metaphysical politics treated political or social subjects as if they could be treated by men not thoroughly trained in natural science as a whole. And there is of course an element of truth in that, because the predecessors of Comte assumed that the principles of politics, i.e., the moral principles, have a source of their own, and therefore there is no need to establish them by means of biology and so on. Even Hobbes asserted—and precisely Hobbes, Hobbes indeed being a metaphysical political philosopher in Comte's sense—that his political philosophy is intelligible without natural science.

Now what is common to both theological and metaphysical politics—and here we come to a deeper level—is the belief that social phenomena are, as it were, indefinitely and arbitrarily modifiable by the legislator or by providence. In other words, metaphysical politics exaggerated in an absurd manner the influence of the individual genius. It was blind to the fact that political phenomena are subject to veritable natural laws; hence political actions are subject to fundamental limitation. From this Comte concludes the vanity of the search of the best government absolutely, the search characteristic of metaphysical politics, namely, the search for the best government absolutely, i.e., without regard to any definite state of civilization, for the invariable natural laws to which Comte appeals circumscribe for each epoch the fundamental limits and the essential character of political action. Metaphysical politics treats the political and social organization in isolation, that is to say, as independent of the corresponding civilization. In the language now prevailing today, it disregards the cultural matrix of the political and social organization. The harmony between the whole and the parts of the social system is in principle spontaneous, not due to conscious action: government is an outgrowth of society proceeding from a spontaneous consensus. In other words, government is not *made*, as the metaphysical politics according to Comte assumes. The primary action is that of society; that of government is secondary. The artificial and voluntary order, made by men, is a simple prolongation of the natural and involuntary order. We can state this view as follows. Society is natural. It comes into being naturally and it subsists naturally, without any human doing. Naturally: that means in accordance with natural laws. To use another distinction not used by Comte but parallel to what he thinks: society has grown and grows, it is not made.

Now those of you who know a bit of what Comte calls metaphysical politics must be wondering: Where do we find this metaphysical politics? Does he not set up a phantom? Or was there such a politics once, which assumed the omnipotence or quasi-omnipotence

of government, of human voluntary action, and saw in it the ground of society and of government? Where do we find it? Well, you remember that Aristotle said that the *polis*, the city, society, is by nature, i.e., it grows out of families, clans, etc., so there was nothing new in that. But where do we find this view of the quasi-omnipotence of government?

Student: In Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. The social contract idea.

LS: Yes. What does the social contract, at least as understood by these men, imply?

Same Student: It implies that there was a time when society existed without government.

LS: Oh, no, no. Perhaps Locke believes that, but surely not Hobbes and Rousseau. No, we have isolated individuals, and these isolated individuals figure out that they are in a very bad situation; and on the basis of this figuring out, they consciously form societies through this conscious act of the social contract. And these people, when setting up their government, are of course perfectly free to set up this or that[8] kind of government. They deliberate: Should we have a monarchy, an aristocracy, or a democracy? And whatever they voluntarily and consciously decide upon, that government will come into being. So in other words, Comte's description of metaphysical politics is a kind of caricature, but not altogether misleading, of[9] the most famous teachings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Aristotle's *Politics* would not be metaphysical in this sense, although Comte does not make this sufficiently clear. But still, what Comte teaches is of course not the same as what Aristotle teaches. What is the difference between Aristotle's teaching on this point and Comte's teaching?

Student: One difference would be that Aristotle does not distinguish the state and society.

LS: Very good. Crucial. There are families, naturally, and there are all kinds of loose associations among citizens and so on, but there is no notion of society. That is of decisive importance. This concept of the society developed only in the modern age, in connection with the market especially, in connection with the emergence of modern political economy. That is very true. Now this is connected with something else. The political society, according to Aristotle, the *polis*, is concerned with the common good, and politics means a conscious concern with the common good. And the common good is above all the quality of the citizen body—naturally also the walls of the city, public defense, etc., etc., but the highest consideration is the quality of the citizen body. Now this is intrinsically a much higher object than that of what Comte calls society, the production of goods. Is this not however admitted by Comte too? Does not Comte admit that it is absolutely necessary to be concerned with the quality of the citizen body, with education in the widest sense of the term? To some extent, Comte surely does, and this is for Comte the function of the spiritual as distinguished from the temporal government. To some extent, what he calls spiritual government is an attempt to solve the question which Aristotle had in mind. But there is a great difference nevertheless between Comte and Aristotle on this point, because according to Comte what is decisive for society is the

character of common opinion. Is that common opinion[10] [that] is always there[11] theological or scientific? And only if it is scientific is it truly good. Now how does this fit in with Aristotle's whole way of thinking? Let me leave it now at saying that Aristotle does not consider the possibilities of common opinion of society molded by science. Why this is so and what this implies, that is a very broad question. I limit myself now to stating the mere fact.

Now metaphysical politics in Comte's sense has this character: a thinker finds out that this and this is the right political order; whether it is absolute monarchy of Hobbes, or constitutional monarchy of Locke, or the direct democracy of Rousseau doesn't make any difference. And then he says [that] what is required for its establishment is only that the legislator or founder have a sufficient force to bring about that establishment. Against this, Comte argues that the power of the natural laws is much greater than that of any human will. It is hard to find an example of this view of political philosophy according to which the founder of a society can establish *any order he pleases* on society provided he has the sufficient physical force. The closest approximation to it which I know occurs in Machiavelli's *Discourses*, book 1, chapter 18, where Machiavelli discusses the question: Can a man who wants to establish a tyranny in an incorrupt society, in a society unfit for tyrannical government, succeed in doing that? And Machiavelli says that is very hard, he needs a couple of generations to corrupt the citizen body, and he won't live long enough, but if for one reason or another he has sufficient force he can bring it about in his lifetime. I believe that Machiavelli means this with a certain irony; this has no direct basis in the character of metaphysical politics itself.

Another characterization of metaphysical politics (which is implied in what I said before, but I think I should mention it nevertheless) is the belief in the unlimited power of education. Just as there is an unlimited power of government, so too [there is] an unlimited power of education: you can make of men by education whatever you see fit. Impossible, according to Comte, because of the natural laws. I will read to you a passage here which describes the spirit of positive politics as Comte sees it.

"The eminently relative spirit of positive philosophy will gradually dissipate, to the evident profit of the general order, this absolute disposition, as narrow as irrational, common to theological politics and metaphysical politics, which drives them unceasingly to wish to realize uniformly, in all possible stages of civilizations, their respective types of unchangeable governments; and which, for example in our age, has led people to conceive no other means of civilizing Tahiti except with the help of the banal importation of Protestantism and parliamentary government."[ix]

So positive politics does not believe that there is a single desirable[12] form of government which can be established at any time, in any place, but which kind of government is good for a given society depends on the character of the society in question. The spirit of positive politics is described by Comte in the term "wise resignation," a resignation imposed on man by the knowledge of the natural laws which cannot be transgressed and which limit human action. True liberty can only consist in a rational submission to the

[ix] Comte, *Cours*, vol. 4, 189.

preponderance, the overwhelming power, of the fundamental laws of nature, as distinguished from the arbitrary commands of rulers, where it would be foolish to be resigned because these arbitrary commands could be changed; the fundamental laws of nature cannot be changed.

Another point: metaphysical politics is characterized by the preponderance of purely material considerations. He means by that the view that all political evils are due to faulty institutions and not to the social ideals and morals, i.e., to the doctrines prevailing in society. Now[13] the belief in propaganda which you find frequently today is of course also a belief in institutions in Comte's sense, insofar as propaganda can be manipulated and is based on the view that human opinions can be manipulated, whereas Comte implies this change of opinions is a matter which cannot be manipulated but is a very, very long process and due especially in our age to the expansion of the positive spirit, which requires time of its own. In other words, the metaphysical politics believes that the temporal rulers can do what can be done in a way only by the spiritual rulers, namely, the change of opinions taking place in a generation. Metaphysical politics expects salvation from political action, and especially revolutionary action—or, overstated, as Comte does it occasionally—from military action: by force you establish the right order. Metaphysical politics, we may say, is (although Comte doesn't use that term) unhistorical. It ascribes a chimerical fixity to essentially variable conditions, and at the same time it despises the social or historical continuity. It trusts more in conscious actions, reform or revolution than in the spontaneous changes. The very ends which men pursue are themselves, according to Comte, products of the historical process; i.e., these very ends do not lie within the power of the individual thinker.

"In the real development of social evolution, the spontaneous modifications eventually produced by the gradual course of events are, generally speaking, by far superior to what the most eminent reformers could have dared to conceive in advance. A philosophy which necessarily takes history as its principal scientific base, which represents in every respect the men of all times, as well as of all places, as indispensable cooperators in the same fundamental evolution, intellectual or moral,[x] moral or political, and which in any case attempts always to attach the actual process to the whole of real antecedents, must certainly be judged to be much more proper today than any other philosophy to regularize the idea and the sentiment of social continuity, without incurring the danger of that servile and irrational admiration of the past."[xi]

In other words, change is inevitable, but this change is a matter of a spontaneous [occurrence] rather than to be brought about by human planning. Metaphysical politics conceives of society itself as due to human making. Some individuals founded society because they became convinced of the usefulness of society to the individuals—Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau—which implies that man is not by nature sociable, which Comte denies. Metaphysical politics is characterized by the primacy of the individual and his rights, and especially this leads to the belief in the absolute right of free examination, or the dogma of the unlimited freedom of the conscience. It leads finally to distrust of the

[x] Comte has "intellectual or material."
[xi] Comte, *Cours*, vol. 4, 582.

government, to the belief that government is by its nature the necessary enemy of society, a thought intimated by Rousseau in the *Social Contract* and more clearly stated by Thomas Paine. The common defect of theological and metaphysical politics: they have no awareness of historical continuity and its salutary character. Proof: the theologians condemn the modern development, and the metaphysicians condemn the Middle Ages. Comte's positive politics sees the necessity, and hence the right or the function, of both the medieval order and the modern development. Social conditions in every epoch are as perfect as possible; therefore the criticism of certain features of, say, the Middle Ages, or of modern times, or of any other society is absurd. Social conditions are in every respect as perfect as possible, which also means that they can be models for another society. Let me read to you another passage.[xii]

. . . is the correlative to it.[14] Social conditions are in every epoch as perfect as possible, but of course not simply perfect, and therefore the possibility and the need for progress: a higher perfection is possible in the twentieth century than was possible in the Middle Ages or in ancient China, or whatever have you. Now if this is so, this leads to the consequence—and this is crucial—of the coincidence of the Is and the Ought. At every time the perfect is actual; only, the perfect for stage A is not the perfect for stage B, C, D, etc. If this is so, there is no need of course for any Ought. I [will] read you a passage: "Positive philosophy alone has been constantly progressing since a long series of centuries, while its antagonists have been constantly decaying." Now listen: "Whether this is good or bad, is of little importance. The fact itself is undeniable, and this is sufficient."[xiii]

In other words, every wave of the future is good. We do not have to raise the question whether it is a good or a bad wave. This is one reason why already in Comte, and also in the later development of positivism, the question of the Ought tended to become less and less important, especially after the impact of the evolutionist doctrine on social science. When evolution determines what will come, we don't have to raise the question of what *should* come, because this would be of no influence whatever. And the great reaction to that trend, [that] tendency, in social science in the second half of the nineteenth century was the so-called fact-value distinction which is so characteristic of social science today. In other words: against this so-called evolutionism: the real assertion that the evolution does not tell you anything as to the goodness of that trend. The question of the Ought cannot be answered by the question of the Is. And in this respect, that was a very sound reaction. Now before I turn to some concluding remarks about Comte, I would like to see whether I have made these points clear regarding Comte's teaching . . . [xiv]

What is directly interesting to us as students of political philosophy is, to repeat, Comte's critique of prepositivistic political philosophy, which he calls metaphysical political philosophy, and therefore I enumerated these points. The general impression one gets from them is that this is a criticism directed above all against the political philosophy of Hobbes and Rousseau and similar thinkers, [and] whether to some extent by implication

[xii] There is a break in the tape at this point; the recording resumes in mid-sentence.
[xiii] Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, vol. 1 (Paris: Bachelier, 1830), 50–51.
[xiv] There is a break in the tape at this point.

it is of course also meant to be a criticism of Plato and Aristotle—if you think of the structure of Aristotle's *Politics*, especially in the more practical parts of the *Politics*, say, book 6 especially, where he[15] [raises] the question how to establish, to set up a democracy, an oligarchy, and so on,[16] the emphasis is on what voluntary action of men can bring about. Needless to say,[17] Aristotle teaches all the time that you cannot set up a democracy if the whole situation is not suitable for democracy, and the same applies of course to oligarchy, and monarchy, [and] whatever else you might think of. But the emphasis on what can be done by man, by political action, is much more powerful in Aristotle—even in Aristotle—than in Comte, where the chief expectation is from what will take place spontaneously, as he called it, especially through the spread of the scientific spirit. Yes, Mr. . . . ?

Student: If these states are supposed to be in a certain historical order, does he explain why, for instance, Aristotle and Plato, as metaphysical philosophers, came before the Middle Ages?

LS: No. That is, I wanted to bring this up. This is one darkness, this is not clear.

Student: Does Comte have any speculations as to what happens after the positive age? Or *is* there an "after" the positive age? Is there a decay, or—

LS: Nothing. Silence. Characteristic of nineteenth-century progressivism, forgetting about the thereafter, in both senses of "there." Yes?

Student: What is the character of the natural laws that . . . ? Are these specific behavioral laws?

LS: Yes, absolutely behavioral laws, not normative laws. One of the—

Same Student: I meant, does he look merely for some general principles as . . . of man?

LS: No,[18] we have one example: the ineptitude of the female sex. That's a natural law. If you try to establish the equality of the sexes, you act against the natural law and the whole thing won't work. That's one example, but I suppose you could also say the abolition of private property, or even perhaps progressive income tax, is against the natural law. I would assume that.

Same Student: How are these laws established?

LS: By scientific methods. Comte has made it clear, however, to begin with, that in social matters, the ordinary experience of mankind, common sense, is quite trustworthy. And[19] that can lead to difficulties. Yes?

Student: If the development of history in stages is inevitable, what is the justification for Comte's writing his book? Can he influence things at all, or why is he writing it?

LS: Well, to some extent, yes, because the transitional stage, with all its miseries, will last longer than if people know what is the situation. They're in a crisis, and this would be admitted by some people, I am sure. Now what is the crisis, what is the root of the crisis? Even the insight that nothing fundamental can be done about it is of course an intellectual solution of the practical problem, is it not?[20] Think of Vietnam[xv] today. Let us assume that someone comes to the conclusion: nothing can be done, just hanging on. In other words, the crisis will go on for the possible future. That is still a practically important theoretical observation, is it not?

Same Student: Well, you said earlier that Comte even went so far as to say that individuals' acts were the product of the development of history in stages. If that were carried to the full extent, doesn't it mean that what anybody does—

LS: No, I suppose Comte would say that maybe if I don't do that, in fifty years quite a few people will see without my help that this is a problem and might adjust themselves, and advise others to adjust themselves. Two hundred years from now it wouldn't make, perhaps, any difference. But in the meantime it would make a lot of difference, whether they . . . Yes?

Student: Is it proper for us to ask for evidence for some of his statements, like greater intelligence makes for greater sociability? Or is that just a first principle on which he—

LS: No, no. Well, he argues that out to some extent, that if people are more thoughtful, look into things more closely, then they will see that their responsibility extends further than if they had not done so. There is something to that, is it not true? I mean, if someone says: I don't care, that is not my business, and then you show him that his well-being depends on these and these public affairs being done properly, then he would act in a more enlightened manner, less narrowly egoistic than in the first case. He does not solve entirely the problem, because there can be a kind of egoism advanced, promoted by intelligence, I know that. But generally speaking, as was shown also by the last statements which I quoted, Comte is surely guilty of a very great optimism, and the strange thing is that he accuses the theologians and the metaphysicians of optimism. You know what optimism means originally: that this world is the best of all possible worlds. Now if someone says [that] social conditions are in every epoch as perfect as possible—if this is not optimism, it is hard to say what it is. In other words, that is not a reasonable kind of discussion: Are you an optimist or a pessimist? One would have to specify it properly.

Well then, I will turn and make a few critical considerations regarding Comte. I was happy to see that some of the points which I wanted to make have already been anticipated by some of you.

Now the core of Comte's teaching is the law of the three stages, as successive stages. Can one understand the history of the world, or at least the history of the West, in terms of that law? For example, if you take the development from Plato to Archimedes (and here

[xv] The Vietnam War, 1954–75.

we have in between the Stoics, who had some influence on Roman law, some social influence), this would seem to be metaphysical rather than theological, and yet it was succeeded by the clearly theological Middle Ages. This is a minor difficulty for Comte. But more important, his prediction of the victory of the positive spirit: in the foreseeable future, only the positive spirit will possess public power. He doesn't mean that there will not be individuals who think in either metaphysical or theological terms; that would be of no interest to him. But what about the "isms" which raise their ugly heads after Comte, in the twentieth century especially? Communism and fascism—clearly something like metaphysical politics from the point of view of Comte.

But on the other hand, if you think of such facts as the Supreme Court decision regarding desegregation, based on the findings of social science,[xvi] this would not have been possible a hundred years ago, whereas a Supreme Court decision based on metaphysical or theological considerations is, I believe, today unthinkable. This is one of the things which shows some element of truth in what Comte meant. Yes?

Student: I was thinking that the "isms" we have experienced in the twentieth century, communism and fascism, laid claim to validity partially on a scientific basis.

LS: Yes, but Comte could say with some plausibility that the old metaphysicians also claimed to be scientific and were not.

Same Student: Oh, I see.

LS: Therefore they are in fact metaphysical and not—as has often been said, of course, of communism especially—metaphysical and not positive.

Now to come somewhat closer to the core of his teaching, Comte's political solution: the rule of the men of science, the new power spiritual. This is based on the premise that ideas or opinions govern the world. From this it follows that the men of science will have the moral authority in the future which the clergy possessed in the Middle Ages, but the situation, I believe, is somewhat different, because in the Middle Ages the temporal rulers were checked not only by the power spiritual but also by their armed subjects. What about the subjects of the captains of industry? The workers, peasants, and so on remain [stuck]. And above all, in the medieval order there were very great sanctions in the afterlife on obedience or disobedience to the power spiritual. There is no equivalent for that in the rule of the scientists. They do not have this power over the souls of their subjects as the clergy had. Comte overestimates the power of reason or of ideas. And this is very strange, because he insists on the secondary character of reason, as compared with the passions, especially the selfish passions. From this point of view one can see why Marx could have a much deeper social influence already in the nineteenth century than Comte, because Marx did not overestimate the power of ideas or reason.

Comte is clearly antidemocratic, and his notion of government shows this very clearly. The notion of the sovereignty of the people, which emerged especially in Rousseau,[21] in

[xvi] *Brown* v. *Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 482 (1954).

the context of metaphysical politics, is for him an absurdity. His antidemocratic stand is based on his belief in the incompetence of the masses, and he puts his trust in the men at the top, the captains of banks and industry, controlled in a way by the men of science. The social organization tends ever more to divide labor in accordance with the characteristics of each individual, regardless of whether these characteristics are congenital or due to education and social position. Now[22] [here] the question of justice arises. Is an inferiority due to inferior education, inferior social position, something which it is necessary to admit, or can this not be changed by a social action? And you know the tremendous importance which this thought had in the time after Comte.

The stabilization, the order, for which Comte longed was brought about after his time by democracy. And democracy existed at that time only in this country, and there was a great European thinker who informed Europe about this country and the likely future of Europe to be seen in America. That was Tocqueville. Tocqueville was more foreseeing of these things, in this respect more prophetic, than Comte. I do not say that a man must give right prophecies in order to be wise, but if he insists on prediction of the future as the sign of wisdom, as Comte does, to be a false predictor is fatal. In other words, stabilization was brought about not by science but by democracy. To this one might raise this objection: Is not the victory of democracy fundamentally the same as the victory of science? Dewey said that the method of democracy is the method of intelligence, and the method of intelligence is of course the method of science: Ergo, there is a fundamental harmony between science and democracy. Now this is a very long question. But that it is a question is shown by the fact that within democracy the question arises: Democracy or rule of experts, technocracy? And the technocracy is in a way closer to what Comte meant than the democracy. And so the technocrats would be strictly specialists, and the men who he believed should be the rulers[23] could not be mere specialists, that goes without saying.

We must note the contrast between his positivism, his alleged sobriety based on knowledge of laws, of behavioral laws, practical laws, and his amazing utopianism. Now let us look a bit more closely at this point. Science as Comte understands it deals only with the How, not with the Why.[24] For example, it is perfectly satisfied with the law of gravitation, the Newtonian law, without going into the question of what *is* gravitation, the innermost nature of it. As he also puts it, the question of the Where and Whither are not raised and answered by science, only the question of How. Yet these questions not answered by science remain, that is to say, the questions which theology and metaphysics try to answer. Even if we grant that theology and metaphysics do not supply knowledge, they take men's deepest concerns seriously and do not starve them, as science as understood by Comte does. What is most important to men is not dealt with by science. This experience, the ever-increasing awareness, has led to what has been called the flight *from* scientific reason. Science may progress indefinitely, but the more it progresses, the more it becomes aware of its essential limitations, the more that science itself teaches that "I cannot teach you wisdom." And what is the use of all expertise without wisdom?

So in other words, Comte was in this respect too—to use his phrase—optimistic that science could truly take the place and fulfill the social and human function that surely

theology filled, and to some extent even metaphysics. According to Comte, the fundamental error of theology and metaphysics consisted in making man the key to the understanding of everything: gods understood[25] in the light of man; teleological explanation of nature, as it were all nature is willing and purposeful, also in the light of . . . According to Comte, the fundamental science is mathematics, *the* nonteleological science. His hierarchy of the sciences implies that there is no essential difference between men and brutes: psychology a part of zoology. Yet is not mathematics a creation of the human mind, the social mind, and not of the brutish mind? Science is essentially of human, not brutish, origin. Can science be understood as the product of the subhuman, directly or indirectly? Is then not man truly the key, if not in a very simplistic manner? Finally, regarding his religion of humanity, based on the awareness of a religious sanction, it is clear that this religion of humanity is an ersatz religion. I suppose you know this German term *ersatz*, which was coined in the First World War when Germany was blockaded and there had to be some substitute for coffee and cocoa, and perhaps even bread. *Ersatz* means substitute, but it has this especially nasty meaning which it acquired in Germany at that time. Now an ersatz religion is a substitute religion with which you could perhaps be satisfied in an extreme pinch, but which is surely not the right thing. The question would be: Can men who are heirs to the biblical tradition worship something that is not eternal?

Now I [will] read to you one quite revealing passage: "The actual march of our individual development from infancy to maturity."[xvii] And the same is also true on a large scale: there is also such a march of the human race from infancy to maturity. Well, if we look at the individual, we know that if he lives long enough, there will also be a stage of old age, not to say senility, and eventually death. What about the old age of the human race, to say nothing of its death? Here we see—this point came up in the discussion—here we see again his "quote optimism," so strange because his major objection to theology and metaphysics is frequently expressed by the assertion that they are fundamentally optimistic. Now the reaction to this kind of optimism (Comte and all that) came very soon in the second half of the nineteenth century, because this was exactly the heyday of "quote pessimism," which was connected primarily with the name of Schopenhauer but which had other famous representatives—Melville, in this country—and which was the counterwave to these unsupported hopes. And it is clear that what remained of Comte up to the present day was the clarity about the fundamental difference between the modern scientific approach and all earlier approaches; and then the second concern [is] that this has an enormous social influence, at least via technology, which no one can deny. But any further assertion regarding the positive spirit which Comte makes is unsupported, has proven to be unsupported.

Now with this I conclude my remarks about Comte. We will now turn to the post-Comtean transformation of positivism, to come to our present problem. And the most important development, as far as we as social scientists are concerned, is the stripping of science, in particular social science, of all right to pass value judgments. This change took place a long time after Comte's death and had nothing directly to do with him. For Comte there was no question: he taught a morality, i.e., an Ought, without any

[xvii] Comte, *Cours*, vol. 4, 655.

feeling that in doing so he ceased to be a scientist, this altruistic teaching. He spoke of progress all the time, and clearly, if you speak of progress [scientifically], you presuppose that you know this and these and these are values, to use this language. It was no question for Comte, but this became a question towards the end of the nineteenth century, and it has now, after that, become completely victorious in the Western world: the view that social science as science cannot pass any value judgment. Now if this is so, clearly political philosophy as concerned with good or just government is an impossibility. It can be a matter of preaching, but it has no place in academic halls because there we are dedicated to science. To this issue I would like to devote the next lecture.

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[2] Deleted “the.”
[3] Deleted “means.”
[4] Deleted “and.”
[5] Deleted “this.”
[6] Moved “not.”
[7] Deleted “field.”
[8] Deleted “or that.”
[9] Deleted “the teachings of the seventeenth.”
[10] Deleted “there.”
[11] Deleted “that common opinion, is”
[12] Deleted “form of good.”
[13] Deleted “the view that.”
[14] Deleted “Societies are.”
[15] Deleted “always raised”
[16] Deleted “this is clearly.”
[17] Deleted “that.”
[18] Deleted “for example, this.”
[19] Deleted “this leads of course to—you know.”
[20] Deleted “I mean.”
[21] Deleted “on the basis of.”
[22] Deleted “therewith”
[23] Deleted “were.”
[24] Deleted “It does not go into the question.”
[25] Deleted “like.”

Session 3: January 13, 1965

Positivism After Comte: Simmel

Leo Strauss: At the end of last meeting one of the students[1] raised a difficulty, an objection to my critical remarks about Comte. Now let me first repeat my statement, which he had in mind: Science in Comte's meaning deals only with the How of phenomena, not with the Why. Yet the questions regarding the Why, the Where, and Whither remain, that is to say, the questions which theology and metaphysics try to answer. Even if we grant that theology and metaphysics do not supply knowledge, they take care of men's deepest concerns and take them seriously, and they do not starve them. Hence what is most important to man is not dealt with by science, and this leads or can lead to the flight from scientific reason. Now the objection was this: But theology and metaphysics are untrue; hence they are in no way a threat to science. Was this not the point you made?

Student: Yes.

LS: Well, the difficulty is this: positivism cannot say that the answers which theology and metaphysics give are untrue. It cannot go beyond saying that they go beyond the competence of science, that they are scientifically baseless. But that is not the same as untrue. This is a very serious difficulty. Now positivists in our age, and partly even Comte himself, have tried to find this way out: by saying that theology and metaphysics are not indeed untrue but their propositions are meaningless. Meaningless. That is in a way worse than untrue. For in order to be meaningful, a proposition must be susceptible of being validated or invalidated by scientific means, which the proposition, for example, "God exists" is not. Ultimately they must be susceptible of being validated or invalidated by sense perception, by observation. But the question arises: Is all experience sense experience? Is there not such a thing as religious experience? There is a book by William James on *The Variety of Religious Experience*, which would give you food [2][for thought].[i] Some people are, as Max Weber said of himself, "quote religiously unmusical," but this means of course that they are for this very reason incompetent judges: just as an ordinarily unmusical man is a bad judge of music, a religiously unmusical man is a bad judge of religion. So positivism would need a kind of what we can call negative metaphysics in order to take care of theology and metaphysics, but, being positivism, it is incapable of developing such a negative metaphysics.

There is another point which one must consider. The primary view of the truth, which is still very powerful in Comte, is that truth is the adequation of the intellect and the thing, *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, or, in other words, that knowledge reproduces being as it is. There are certain difficulties here. In the very beginning of the modern development, say, in the seventeenth century, Locke made this distinction already on the basis of Galileo and Descartes between primary and secondary qualities: the primary qualities, extension

[i] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1902).

and impenetrability; the secondary qualities, colors, sounds, and other sense qualities. And the latter were understood to be only subjective: green, shrill, or whatever you might take. This was generally understood. But then the question arises: What about the primary qualities themselves? So the thing itself consists of the primary qualities alone. The things as understood by physics: Are these the things as they are in themselves? Are they not theoretical constructs, i.e., human constructs, things relative to man in contradistinction to the things in themselves? The conclusion from this line of argument was this: science gives us only knowledge of the phenomenal, or what is relative to man; of the absolute, it does not give us any knowledge. This field remains open for a nonscientific or trans-scientific metaphysics. The very insight into the relativity of scientific knowledge causes the longing for absolute knowledge.[3] The only school in our age which still maintains[4] [this old simpleminded view that truth is the adequation of intellect and the thing] is orthodox Marxism-Leninism. The issue came to a head in Lenin's criticism of Mach, an Austrian physicist and philosopher, who had questioned this view that knowledge is knowledge of the things in themselves.[ii] This school was called empirico-criticism, for some reason, and Lenin's criticism of empirico-criticism is very interesting to read.[iii] He tries to uphold the simple, old-fashioned view that to know things means to know them as they are in themselves and not merely relative to man. And whether Lenin was victorious in that fight, that would be a long question to decide. Of course it was the older view, Aristotelian and so on. But in our age, on the basis of modern science, this phenomenalistic view, as it is sometimes called, has proven to be more powerful. This is an additional reason why the longings for metaphysics continue to exist and to be quite powerful, side by side with science. This difficulty is by no means solved. That would be my answer to your question. Good.

Now to turn to positivism as it appears after Comte. There are two differences which are of crucial importance. The first is this. Whereas for Comte science, positive science, is only common sense carried through, common sense universalized, for present-day positivism it is understood that there is a radical difference between science and common sense. An important step for this change was the emergence of non-Euclidean geometry, already in Comte's lifetime, but Comte apparently was not aware of that. Science is not the prolongation of common sense but its radical transformation. The world as seen by physics, by the physicist, is not the true world; it is a different world which has immense uses, but we have no right to say that it is the true world in contradistinction to the phenomenal world.

The second point is of much greater practical importance in the social sciences: in order to be scientific, social science, or science in general, must strip its subjects of all value predicates. And this applies of course especially to social science. In other words, not only the sense qualities (blue, green, or whatever have you) but also the value qualities are strictly, radically, subjective and have no place in science, even more so than the sense qualities because at least there is a universal agreement among all normal men that

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[ii] Ernst Mach (1838–1916), founder of the modern philosophy of science and forerunner of logical positivism.

[iii] V. I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirico-Criticism*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 14 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964).

this is brown or that is green, but as to whether something is good or bad, there is a very wide disagreement among men. The starting point of this doctrine is at first glance the distinction between the Is and the Ought. Is-statements, that this or that *is* so, and ought-statements, that this or that *ought to be* so, have no logical connection with each other. It is not possible to infer from the fact that something *is* that it *ought* to be nor, vice versa, to infer from the fact that something ought to be that it is. To infer from the Is to the Ought means to be a conformist of the worst order—whatever is, is good—and to infer from the Ought to the Is is wishful thinking. Up to this point this is of course absolutely sound.

So this distinction between the Is and the Ought, which is a very difficult distinction, is somehow in a way immediately intelligible to everyone today. But the distinction between the Is and the Ought is not decisive for the present-day position, because this distinction was made by Kant above all, or by Hume, for that matter, and neither Kant nor Hume said it is not possible to make objective value judgments. On the contrary. So the characteristic premise of present-day social science does not support this distinction, but the additional assertion that there is *no knowledge* of the Ought in any manner, shape, or form, while there *is* knowledge of the Is. This is a peculiarity of present-day social science, because there was a thing throughout the ages called skepticism, which denied the possibility of objective value judgments, but it denied also the possibility of Is-statements: there is no knowledge of the truth. Present-day social science is not skeptical at all. It admits the possibility of science but it denies the possibility of objective value judgments.

What I said implied another premise. Is/Ought is the first stage. Now by the Ought we ordinarily understand some moral things, duties. But this is extended beyond the sphere of morality, and that is implied in the term "value." For example, if I say something is beautiful, there is no Ought in any way involved, and yet it is a value judgment. So value includes the good and the beautiful and, if there is another sphere of values, that in addition. It is much larger. Ultimate values, it is asserted, are irreducible to any Is and hence indemonstrable. And furthermore, there are many (if only two, but more [than that]) ultimate values, which are incompatible with one another, because if they were not incompatible with one another, then there would be no difficulty. But since they are incompatible, the question is: Which to choose? This question cannot be rationally settled. And [they are] *ultimate* values because a given value—I won't define what a value is, following the positivists themselves—if I have a given value, it may be possible to reduce it to a higher value, to a more fundamental value, so that value A would follow logically from value B. So value A is no problem in itself; the problem is only value B, from which value A is derived.

Still, it is asserted that science is not completely baffled by the existence of values: science can handle them, in a manner. It can analyze them, it can describe them, it can clarify their meanings. Let us assume someone would say: My value is political liberty. Well, the social scientist can take cognizance of that, and he can explain what this individual understood by political liberty and distinguish it perhaps from other meanings of political liberty without however being able to say which is the superior meaning or

whether political liberty in itself is valuable. This is beyond its competence. Furthermore, social science can do the following thing: if the values function as ends, science can establish which means are required for the actualization of these ends, which includes the possibility that science might be able to show that certain ends cannot be actualized at all, and to that extent it refutes this end or this value as a possible end. Science can furthermore try to establish correlations between values and human types—social, racial, or what have you, for example, showing that lower-middle-class people as a rule go in for value A, upper-middle-class people go in for value B, and so on. This is a relation between values and facts, values and Is, without in any way of course establishing therewith the value of the values.[5] A lower-middle-class man who by virtue of his social-class position could be expected to cherish value A—but he can only be expected to do that. If he is a loner, a Lone Ranger, and says No, I prefer the upper-class value, that is his business. He is not obliged, obviously, to follow the value of his class.

Now the fact-value distinction is meant as a logical distinction. What does this mean? What is the relevant meaning of this statement here? A psychological connection between a value and a given human type, for example, is irrelevant for the discussion of a value. For—and here we come to the meaning of the distinction between logic and psychology—psychology deals with the genesis of human thoughts. The validity of human thoughts is something entirely different, beyond the competence of psychology. The nondistinction between genesis and validity is said to be the error of something called psychologism. The proposition itself and its validity must be decided entirely in nonpsychological terms, i.e., in terms[6] [other than] the genesis. So if a man would say [that] slitting men's throats and drinking their blood is good (there may be such a view), he cannot be criticized on the ground that this proposition stems from insanity, because that is only the question of the genesis of the proposition and has nothing to do with the question of its validity. We have to take the proposition by itself, in isolation. That is another important indication of this view.

Now this view is at present the official doctrine, by which I mean, the large majority, perhaps the overwhelming majority, of social scientists—especially in this country, but also in a large part of Europe—holds to this view; and therefore everyone is compelled to familiarize themselves with it and to take a stand toward it. This view emerged in the last decade of the nineteenth century in Germany, but it became accepted in this country only after World War I, and only in the last two or three decades has it become unqualifiedly predominant. Now in order to get some inkling of this view I will read you a statement first by Albert Einstein, the famous physicist. I quote: "If someone approves as a goal the extirpation of the human race from the earth, one cannot refute such a viewpoint on rational grounds."[iv] That is to say, on nonrational grounds, meaning: I don't like it. Of course you can say that, but that is clearly not a refutation; it is only putting one preference against another. You see also that Einstein says it is not refutable on *rational* grounds. Now Einstein was a physicist, and if he would have said "on physical grounds," maybe he is right. He would surely be more competent to say that than I. But he doesn't say, "on scientific grounds"; he says, "on rational grounds," identifying tacitly rational

[iv] From the essay "On Freedom" (1940), in Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, trans. Sonja Bargmann (New York: Crown, 1954).

and scientific. This we note only in passing. Now let us consider this example, perhaps in order to enter this subject matter. We have heard a different slogan in more recent times, "Better dead than Red," which agrees partly with this view, in relation to the H-bomb, which Einstein probably had in mind. But what is the difference between "Better dead than Red" and Einstein's proposition? There is a very striking difference, from the point of view of rationality.

Student: The word "better" in there means there is a good and bad implied.

LS: Well, yes, I do think of that, but we can state it perhaps a bit more exactly. In the second case a reason is given, whereas Einstein's man doesn't give any reason, he only says: I like the extirpation of the human race. The other man says: No, no, I do not want the extirpation of the human race, but I am absolutely opposed to communism, and if the world should become communist I am in favor of a last-minute war which may indeed have this consequence of death. Einstein does not even attempt to give a reason, and he calls this "rational." What could the reason be for[7] [a man] to say: I wish the extirpation of the human race? Well, he might think that men are such abominable creatures that they should be extirpated. Prior to investigation, that is of course possible, but naturally it would apply to the speaker himself, yes? And one could say: Would it[8] not [be] more sensible of him to commit suicide [laughter] and let the others decide for themselves!

Now let us take another example. The Nazis said [that] not the human race should be extirpated, but the Jews should be extirpated. Why? They were much more rational than Einstein. They said: It is good for Germany. So they gave a reason. I'm not concerned with whether the reasons are good or bad, I note the fact that the Nazis were in this respect more rational than the great physicist Einstein. They gave a reason. Now what is implied in that? That destroying human beings just for the sake of destroying them, or even destroying anything for [the sake of] destroying it, killing for the sake of killing—[9] "for kicks," as some juveniles, I believe, say—there is something savage, inhuman in that. When you read the *Iliad* and see the manner in which Achilles treats the corpse, mind you, of Hector in a very beastly manner, the horror of the poet is quite clearly visible in that. Here we have an example. This is a way in which human feeling goes. Something in us, we do not know what, but something in us as human beings disapproves of destruction for destruction's sake, killing for killing's sake. We are perfectly open to the possibility that some killings may be good, but cause must be shown why it should be good. Perhaps there is a connection between being a human being and humanity. The etymological connection is known to every one of you because *humanus* is Latin for[10] human. Perhaps there is a connection between being a human being and humanity, between being a human being, i.e., the Is, and the Ought of humanity. This [is] only a very general and provisional example.

We can also take this into consideration: Why are people empirically opposed, even if they are old and willing to die, and tired of life, why are they generally speaking opposed to the extirpation of the human race without any reason? I believe it is this, most[ly]: people have children, and [they] think [that] what is good for old people is not necessarily good for the children. They think of these children. Via their children, these tired men

have a stake in the future. And even if they do not have children, they regard themselves as members of society, say, the United States,[11] which they wish to have a future.[12] One would have to take this into consideration in order to form a judgment on Einstein's bald thesis.

Now what is the character of the reasoning we use in discussing such a proposition? We did not inquire regarding absolute values, for no reference was made in the statement itself to absolute values. Why should we open this question? An unsupported, practical proposal was made. We asked for support, as we would even if it were a very minor thing, say, that we should have reading periods only of two weeks instead of four weeks. You would say: Why? Now this kind of argument, in a very limited way demanded by the situation, may be called dialectical argument in the original sense: we argue out the case on the basis of what is necessarily implied in it. We can also state it differently. What Einstein did was to identify science with reason. Is there no other reason? Is there not, for instance, practical reason, which has a different character from scientific reason? The reasoning used by Einstein, if you can call this reasoning, is characterized by the fact that it disregards the context in which this proposal is made, the inevitable human context. One can call this kind of reasoning, strictly speaking, abstract insofar as it disregards context.

Now the fact-value distinction is at present generally accepted as evident. Such propositions like those of Einstein are, as the mathematicians today say, elementary. You learn this in the first grade. This of course does not prove the truth of this distinction, for this precisely is the character of prejudice, that something is very evident: How could you ever doubt of it? It may be perfectly questioned. The power of this view merely proves that there are very powerful psychological incentives toward that view.[13] The status of the fact-value distinction cannot be compared to that of a very sophisticated theory in physics, for example, the very understanding of which requires a high degree of competence, say, Einstein's own theory of relativity. Or take Copernicus's theory, centuries before: that was also once paradoxical, and yet accepted and remained. Because the fact-value distinction is not a sophisticated theory, it is extremely simple: the mere thesis can be grasped by the meanest capacities, as[14] [Hobbes] would say, in a single sitting.[v] It is a very recent doctrine. When you think, for example, of John Dewey, who was a very powerful influence in this country for more than one generation, he still did not yet accept it. The first statement of it occurred, as I said, in Germany, in a book by a philosopher-sociologist, Georg Simmel, *Introduction to Moral Science* (*Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft*), 1892.[vi] Now what Simmel does in this book, as he says in the preface, is to give a historical and psychological study of moral principles—a "historical-psychological study." And he calls this pursuit "positive ethics" ("positive" here in the sense of Comte), which treats, as he puts it, "good and evil as equally indifferent subjects of a merely genetic knowledge."[vii] It looks at good and bad as a meteorologist would look at good weather and bad weather: with complete indifference. I will read to you a few more passages.

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[v] "Meanest capacities": see *Leviathan*, chap. 15.
[vi] Georg Simmel, *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft,* 2 vols. (Berlin: W. Hertz, 1892–93).
[vii] *Einleitung*, vol. I, iii, v. Apparently Strauss's translation.

"What is called normative science [as ethics was traditionally thought to be—LS] is in fact only science of the normative. Science itself does not establish or prove norms, but merely explains norms and their correlations. For science always raises only causal, not teleological questions [the question, this norm, what is its cause, that it is accepted in this or that society—LS] and norms and purposes may as well as anything else be the subject of scientific inquiries, but they cannot be the essence of science itself."[viii]

In other words, science itself cannot be normative; it can only deal with norms.

"The pure and ideal scientific problem is this: Given these purposes and conditions, what must we do in order to realize those purposes, while considering these conditions? Only a moral legislator, a practical revolutionary in moral matters, can say simply, while setting up moral, ultimate goals in a dogmatic manner, 'this ought to be!' [no scientist as scientist can—LS] for the ultimate setting up of a rule is a fact which silences criticism [however atrocious that rule may be, it silences criticism. Ethics can set up only hypothetical imperatives, in Kant's sense, not categorical ones—LS]."[ix]

Now a categorical imperative is one which says: Thou shalt do this and that. The Ten Commandments are categorical imperatives. A hypothetical imperative is this: If you want to drink this soup, you must use a can opener. "You must use a can opener" is hypothetical, if you want to have that soup in the can.

I quote another sentence: "value is nothing objective,[x] but arises only in the subjective process of preferring."[xi] I must confess, in my earlier browsings in Simmel's book, I did not become aware of the fact that Simmel truly has this view already perfectly. What prevented me from seeing it was this: Here a man makes a complete break with the whole tradition of ethics in all its forms, without any apparent awareness of the immensity, of the enormous character, of this change. And this I believe is not possible. I believe this is not possible. Take this example, the one fundamental reason which Simmel gives: science is causal, not teleological. Now that was an old story since the seventeenth century. The greatest and most outspoken enemy of all teleology was a man called Spinoza. And what is the title of Spinoza's chief work? *Ethics*, and *normative* ethics. So the distinction between causal and teleological thinking cannot possibly be the sufficient reason for this view of a value-free social science.

I believe, or I suspect, that no epoch-making change in human thought takes place without awareness of it. In other words, there may be great economic changes, for all I know, which take place without any men being aware of it except after it has happened. But in human thought, I believe that is not possible. Now how can we understand this great, radical change in the character of the study of man, which is represented by Simmel's book, and Simmel's not being aware of the profound character of the change?

[viii] *Einleitung*, vol. I, 321.
[ix] *Einleitung*, vol. I, 322.
[x] Strauss omits translations of a few of Simmel's words.
[xi] Simmel, *Einleitung*, vol. I, 232.

Now Simmel was preceded by Nietzsche—Nietzsche, who died probably four years before Simmel's book appeared. Now Nietzsche regarded Schopenhauer as his teacher. Simmel himself later wrote a book on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Now Schopenhauer had said that all philosophers agree as to the content of morality. As he phrased it: Don't hurt anyone, but rather try to help everyone as much as you can. This simple, ordinary morality—there is agreement among all thinking men, Schopenhauer thought. The only difference, and that is very great, among the philosophers concerns the ground on which we believe these things to be our duty. Now this caused Nietzsche's violent reaction. I will read to you one statement: "It is the correct judgment of scholars that men believed at all times to know what is good and bad, praiseworthy and blameworthy; but it is a prejudice of scholars that we know it now better than at any time."[xii] In other words, there is no knowledge of good and bad. No knowledge of good and bad. Nietzsche goes beyond that. Ultimately, all so-called knowledge of good and bad is based on acts of evaluation, not necessarily of the individual, [but] of a whole nation, or a group, and so on. But Nietzsche goes much beyond it. Nietzsche says that ultimately all knowledge, all science, rests on such acts of evaluation [and] is in this sense subjective. Now what Simmel did, we see in the light of Nietzsche more clearly. He made a compromise between Nietzsche's revolution (of which Nietzsche himself was fully aware that it was a revolution) and positivism. In other words, he still accepted the positivistic view of the objectivity of science and combined it with Nietzsche's view of the nonobjectivity of values.

One more point which is important in Simmel, and to some extent even also later, is the issue, the conflict with which Simmel[15] was most immediately concerned, [which] was that between an aristocratic ethics as it partly existed or lingered on in Germany at that time (Prussia), and the socialistic ethics at the other pole. The key point that appears very clearly from the book as a whole: this conflict between these two kinds of ethics cannot be settled by rational means. Social science has to be neutral between these two kinds of morality, just as physics is metaphysically neutral between spiritualism and materialism, a neutrality of which I have spoken before. So from this point of view, the more recent development[s] in the social sciences[16] [seem] to continue only the tendency of modern science towards such a neutrality, but a neutrality now extended beyond metaphysics to ethics. Before I turn to a critical consideration of this view, with which I suppose you are all familiar, I would like to find out whether I have made myself clear regarding the character of the thesis.

Student: I wonder if you could go over once more your point that Simmel makes this compromise between Nietzsche and positivism.

LS: Nietzsche's eventual thesis is that at the bottom of all human convictions there are acts of evaluating, of setting up of values, so that, for example, modern physics, theoretical physics, itself rests on such an evaluation and not only because science is based on the acceptance of the value of truth—this you could say of every form of science—but a very specific evaluation which . . . the problem. Now Simmel rejected that. He accepted the authoritative character of modern science without any hesitation,

[xii] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak* § 2. Presumably Strauss's translation.

but as far as the moral things are concerned, he accepted Nietzsche's view. So it is a kind of compromise between Nietzsche and the then-prevailing view. Yes?

Student: In your explanation of Simmel, you said that you couldn't understand how such a radical break could be made in the whole tradition of philosophy without his comprehending it. Now do you think that—

LS: Well,[17] when you read[18] what he says about these matters, and this enormous book of more than six hundred pages in two volumes, it does not in any way make the impression of being a revolutionary book. When you read later on the statements of Max Weber, they are much more revolutionary in their substance, although Weber himself says it is nothing new, because this was already a kind of settled opinion in certain academic circles in Germany by Max Weber's time. But Weber is overwhelmed, as it were, by this state of things, that certain things which were hitherto regarded as knowable are now admitted to be not knowable at all.

Same Student: In other words, you didn't mean that simply stating the fact that Simmel combined Nietzsche with positivism should take away our shock at seeing him lay these things down.

LS: No, no. There was no pedagogy or soft-sell, no, no. And I believe it becomes intelligible when one presupposes that this book appeared in a country which had been hammered for at least a decade by Nietzsche's immoralism. "Immoralism" is a word which Nietzsche himself used, and which meant surely this: There is no knowledge of good and evil possible. It meant more than that, but this it also meant. Yes?

Student: Could you explain Nietzsche's position a little bit more?[19] Did he believe there was [no] knowledge of the good and the bad, that all scholars had been mistaken on this in the past?

LS: Well, of course this was naturally implied, because hitherto ethics had been a normative science, and not only the doctrines of the so-called Idealists but the British utilitarians. That is of course a normative doctrine: the greatest happiness of the greatest number.[20] But Simmel does not convey to the reader an awareness on his part of the fact that this is a complete change in the character of man's study of man, that what hitherto was taken for granted by everyone, a normative science, ceases to be. I mean, there were of course some preparations for that—Marxism, to some extent. But Marxism in its attack on bourgeois morality[21] of course appealed to another, truer sense of justice, as it thought. No one could say that Marxism is simply nonnormative and ethically neutral in the way in which this present-day social science claims to be ethically neutral. This, I must say, was the reason why I[22] was not inclined to credit Simmel with that, whereas Max Weber, whose essays on this subject appeared about a decade later, originally—Weber is filled with a kind of passion to which he gives very powerful expression due to this new insight. He doesn't claim any originality, he says it is known to the logicians; but Weber was the first who *preached* it, as it were, so that it became after Weber a matter of intellectual integrity whether you will use value judgments in scientific

considerations or not. Weber's articles are translated into English, and I remember in former times they were read in the College here in the social science courses. I do not know what they do now, but I suppose some of you have read them. The most famous of these things is his lecture on "Science as a Vocation," which gives to this view a very powerful expression. And I think if you can read it, you should read that. Yes?

Student: Who was the writer who developed the idea that scientific knowledge somehow is superior to common sense? How did Comte's idea that commonsense knowledge was scientific knowledge come to be overthrown?

LS: Well, you can say the other view, the contempt for common sense, was a much more powerful thing in modern times. If you read Descartes's *Meditations* and see what happens there to common sense, that was a more powerful—. In Comte, his relative sympathy with common sense had very much to do with his peculiar political or social preferences, with a certain conservative inclination. It was an exception of him. Yes?

Student: Mr. Strauss, you said that this movement, trying to be able to speak of values in a causative sense—from which discipline, from which area would the necessary universals for a causal analysis be supplied? You seem to have rejected psychology as a source.

LS: Oh, no. Max Weber thought very [little][xiii] of academic psychology, and he thought the psychology you need for the study of social phenomena is the kind of psychology you practice by playing bridge—you know, you have a certain estimate of the fellows with whom you play—and the refinements of academic psychology are of no value. But generally speaking, the discrediting of psychological questions regarding [questions of] validity[xiv] has nothing to do with a contempt for psychology.

Same Student: I was asking a very narrow question: How do these people see a causal aspiration in terms of value as possible?

LS: Not in terms of values. At most, in terms of people's believing in values. There is a great difference. So if people believe, say, in the Christian values, this will affect their action, of course. And you have to take this into consideration without taking the Christian values as in themselves good or bad. This is beyond the competence of the social science. But[23] the prevailing view in this school is this, which is also the prevailing view in this country: multicausal. There is Marxism, which says [that] ultimately you must understand all social phenomena in terms of the relations of production. And Weber wrote long books in order to show that while in some respects that is quite helpful, there is also the other causation. His famous study on Puritanism and the spirit of capitalism is meant to show that the religious motivation had here a crucial effect on economics, on economic action.[xv] I think that this is the view now generally prevailing. They call it

[xiii] Strauss says "low."
[xiv] Strauss says "regarding validity questions."
[xv] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930). There are many later editions of this work.

multicausal: there is no universal rule as to what has priority in a given situation. That depends. In a certain situation one might be able to show that the decisive causation originated in economic things; in other cases, it may have been religious, or may be due to size, whatever it may be.

Same Student: A further question: This then leaves room open within the social sciences for disagreement on what *the* cause of a particular act is? Some may want to attribute it to religious feeling, the other to an economic—

LS: You know, they would say that is a factual question, and I believe they might very well say, without getting into any trouble on that score, that in a given case you cannot find out unambiguously that this or that was the cause. You must leave it open. There is no difficulty in that. So the key point is: only social science gives causal explanations, and cannot possibly engage in evaluations.

Now let us consider this position critically. Simmel had spoken of the indifference to good and evil, however good or evil may be understood. No consideration of good or evil can be permitted to enter social science. Nothing is intrinsically good[24] [or] bad, intrinsically high or low, healthy or unhealthy: any preference is as good as any other, or as bad as any other. Science itself is of course—that is the natural implication—science itself is not intrinsically higher than prostitution, only some people prefer science and others the other. [Laughter] To the extent to which we are sensitive to good and evil, however understood, we lack the objectivity of social scientists. The necessary condition is moral obtuseness, in any sense of the word. Social science thus understood, if it is consistent (which it very rarely is), inevitably fosters moral obtuseness.

The question arises: Can one understand values, whichever they may be, without being moved by them, without one's horizon being changed by such understanding, so that our very science, our very hypothesis formation and so on, is affected by our understanding of values? People use the word "empathy," and surely in order to understand something you must have empathy with it. Even a criminal judge, and perhaps he more than anybody else, must have empathy with the criminal in order to see what speaks in favor of the criminal. Even with racketeers. And we as social scientists, if we have to deal with that unsavory subject, must have that empathy because this can be rightly expected. From time to time you read works of political historians (I will not give an example) in favor of some hero who was of course at his time attacked by another party, without the historian even making the slightest effort, for a second, to look for one moment at the hero from the hero's enemy's point of view. Perhaps[25] [the enemy had] a point, maybe it was not an important point but a point which one should surely consider. That is a very poor historian—that is a party book, a party pamphlet, and not a historical work. So even, as I say, the racketeers, we have to understand them. Now if we do that, then the values of the racketeers coexist in our mind with the non-racketeer values. There is conflict within us to that extent between the square values—the square's values—and the crooked values. Is it merely blind preference in us which makes us prefer, after due consideration, the square values? Does it make sense to say of a man who is prepared to destroy thousands and thousands of men—drugs, for example—merely in order to have the maximum of

sensual pleasures: Does it make sense to say of such a man that he is a *good* man? If there is an absolute relativity of values, then of course he could be said to be a good man. We sense something of what goodness is; the racketeer does not. He is blind to it; he is incompetent to judge because of his unawareness of that. He is at least as incompetent to judge of the issue as a blind man is incompetent to judge of pictures or of colors.

Some people argue that social science thus understood is not morally irrelevant. For instance, it can show that certain ends are impossible to achieve, and therefore it gives us moral guidance: Abandon this end which cannot be achieved. But as has been said somewhere in Goethe's *Faust*: "Him I love who desires the impossible."[xvi] To desire only the possible—rationality is a value like any other. Or if you say that the matter is [that] everyone wants to succeed, that is a question: Do all men wish to succeed? Are not some people desiring to fail—tragic natures, as some people say? It is also said that social science can show that certain ends are based on objectively untrue premises. For example, the Nazi theory. But again, this helps very little because the question arises: Why should a man choose truth? Why not myth, which supplies power in one way or another? Truth is a value like any other. Social science cannot show of course that social science itself is good, because that would be a value judgment. Yet you hear from time to time this view: whatever end a man may choose, he needs clarity about the means. And this clarity about the means is supplied by social science, that is to say, while all ends are arbitrary, social science is not, because you need it for whichever end you want. But there is this difficulty, of course. If this were so, there would be one objectively valid value judgment: that social science is good, [and this is] contrary to the premise of the whole position.

The fundamental questions, the most important questions, concern the ends, because the means depend entirely on the ends. Social science is incompetent regarding the ends. Social science cannot give us guidance regarding the most important things; hence the flight from scientific reason. Just as in the case of the Why as distinguished from the How, which keeps alive the concern for theology and metaphysics despite the ever-increasing progress of science, and this is true in a more direct way in the case of the value judgments. Now let me explain this a bit more fully.[xvii]
. . . desire which arises in man and for which he is not responsible, and that for which a man takes the responsibility. So let us say then [that] a value is more appropriately defined as the object of conscientious choice; hence the range of values depends on the answer to the factual question of what a value is. Many things which are values on the basis of the crude view according to which a value is an object of desire are not values on the basis of the less crude view. So a different answer to a factual question answers a value question. Take as a simple example the difference between a coward and a conscientious objector. Both don't want to go into the army, but obviously for very different reasons: the coward simply fears death and wounds and discomfort, but the conscientious objector is willing to die for his objection. This distinction is a factually necessary distinction and implies a value distinction, [26][as] the conscientious objector,

[xvi] *Faust*, part 2, act 2, l. 7488.
[xvii] There is a break in the tape at this point; the recording resumes in mid-sentence.

however wrong he may be, is a much more respectable human being than the mere coward.

Now let us apply this to the question of the goodness of science. Science may be an object of desire, like a cake, but it may also be an object of choice, of conscientious choice. Even in the latter case, science is not chosen because it is intrinsically good, objectively good—such things do not exist, according to the hypothesis. It can only be chosen in an act of choice which is not guided or enlightened by the insight into its goodness. This act of choosing science cannot be justified by science. It cannot even be understood by science, for scientific understanding presupposes that we have chosen science already. The fundamental phenomenon, more fundamental than all science, is the abyss of choice. One way to overcome that abyss is the choice of science. A psychological explanation of this fundamental choice comes too late: it presupposes the choice of science.

Another consideration: science is susceptible of infinite progress. That is essential to the present view of science. This implies that reality is such that it cannot be understood in a finite process; otherwise science could not be essentially infinite. In other words, reality is unobtrusively and irretrievably mysterious. This mysteriousness of reality and this abyss of choice, they somehow belong together. These are, one can say, the starting points of existentialism over against positivism in our age. Now it is essential for the claim of present-day social science to be amoral—morally in no way committed. Yet if we proceed empirically, we observe that most social scientists take a very definite moral position, even a political position. That is so. Is this a mere coincidence? For example, generally speaking, social scientists do not take the same moral-political position which many physicians take. I mean, the American Political Science Association has a different line than the AMA,[xviii] which is I think a simple sociological fact. But in the case of the AMA we have no direct interest, but in the case of the APSA we do have. Now what is this peculiar position? We can say liberalism, in the wide sense in which the old-fashioned liberalism of Milton Friedman of our economics department as well as the New Deal liberalism go together.[xix]

Now what does this position mean? What is this liberalism? I would say, a permissive egalitarianism. There is a certain difficulty within permissive egalitarianism, because there may be a possible conflict between permissiveness and egalitarianism. For example, to what extent should one be permissive toward nonegalitarian tendencies? That is a well-known difficulty. Egalitarianism is, I think, clear. Permissive. Think of such questions as homosexuality, the whole thing of the Kinsey Report,[xx] and the whole attitude toward penal law which now prevails. Now, is there a connection between permissive egalitarianism, the prevalent posture of present-day social scientists, and the very principle of social science as previously defined? The social science position implies that

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[xviii] American Medical Association

[xix] Milton Friedman (1912–2006), who for many years held a position at the University of Chicago, was a tireless and eloquent proponent of free-market capitalism.

[xx] Alfred C. Kinsey, et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953).

all values are equal, naturally: if they were not equal, there would be an objective reason for preferring value A to value B, and so on. So all values are equal; that is to say, the principles of actions are equal. Now for any man of common sense, it follows that if all values are equal or all desires are equal, they ought to be *treated* as equal. If you treat equal things differently, then you act in a grossly unfair manner. In other words, it is very hard to avoid this step from the Is to the Ought. Well, naturally there is one limitation for every man of common sense: they ought to be treated as equal within the limits of the possible, so the man who has the value of slitting people's throats and drinking their blood—this wouldn't work very well together with the values of most other people, who strongly object to someone doing that to them. There is a conflict of values, but how can such a conflict be rationally settled? Precisely given the equality of everyone around, the only just way of settling the conflict is to let the majority have it. The majority are absolutely opposed to these throat slitters, for example, and therefore we have laws making this a forbidden action, and so on. So I think there is a deep connection between the social science, the allegedly strictly logical, methodological teaching regarding the equality of all values, and the substantive morality for which most social scientists today stand up.

Now let us have first an exchange about this subject. The question being the effect of value-free social science on morality and the connection with that. Yes?

Student: You said before that there must be very strong psychological inducements to believe modern-day positivism. Would you care to comment on what these might be?

LS: That is a very long question. What I have in mind fundamentally is that this social science as it exists now is the heir of a long tradition which was still normative: think utilitarianism. By virtue of this heritage, of this tradition, the inclinations are in a certain direction. I said many years ago already: Scratch a present-day American relativist, as they call them, and you will find a utilitarian. There is this proverb: "Scratch the Russian and you will find the Tatar," *Grattez le Russe et vous verrez le Tatar*. And in this sense: Take off the thin varnish of this methodological doctrine and you will find a simple straightforward utilitarian. One reason why especially Max Weber and to some extent also Simmel developed their doctrines was their insight into the grave difficulties in which utilitarianism became entangled and, wholly independently of the socialism question,[27] the very great difficulty to define what[28] the greatest happiness of the greatest number means—although, in a crude way, what Bentham and his successors meant was of course clear: Better food, better housing, better care for health of the large mass of the population. And in this respect nothing has changed. I've thought of that. Yes?

Student: Let's suppose that we are social scientists who are asked to join the next administration, and we are called in to counsel the governor or the president or what have you. And he's not going to ask us: What would be good policy? He's going to say: What do the people want? So the point being that it strikes me that as a theoretical objection, your objection to modern social science is valid, but it has little practical consequence, because the agency that decides what values should be the public values are not philosopher-kings but are the sentiments of the people.

LS: That is as it should be in a democracy, but it is not quite so simple. That may be true most of the time, but what is true most of the time may not be true in the most important cases. Some of you may remember what happened in 1945, when President Truman, in accordance with the sentiment of probably 99.9 percent of the American people, demobilized the American forces in Europe: The boys must come home. The consequence was that the boys had to go[29] back [again] to Europe a few years later. In other words, one could say [that] precisely in a democracy it is the duty of the government to look somewhat further ahead than the average citizen does, and if I am not mistaken, that was the underlying idea of representative democracy, i.e., that the people do not govern themselves but [are] governed by men supposed to be more far-seeing than the people at large. This I would say. Now in addition, practical political questions are of such immense complexity that most of them would be in themselves indifferent to the theoretical or moral position a man takes because they have become truly merely technical questions in this manner. But still, at one point or another, and you can never tell in advance at which point, the question of principles will arise. Yes?

Student: Earlier, one of your criticisms of the social scientist taking a perfectly objective view as regards the criminal and the noncriminal was to say that the criminal is as blind to moral things as the sightless person is to the beauty of paintings. I was just wondering how far you would take this analogy, whether you want to imply that moral values are objects of perception in the same way that colors in paintings are, or—

LS: They obviously cannot be objects of sense perception. But there could conceivably be another kind of perception. When you speak of a perceptive man, someone who senses in a way when someone makes a tactless remark—does it not happen?—and he senses it in a way as strongly, although it is very hard to say how this sensing takes place,[30] [as] when one senses a color or a sound. Does this fact not exist? Have you never seen people either expressing sentiments which impressed you as very noble, or others expressing sentiments which are very base? You sense that nobility on the one hand and the baseness on the other. I mean, the analysis of what this sensing means is very difficult, but nevertheless there is a kind of direct awareness which we have and which surely we would not have if we did not have a certain upbringing, so that a baby or a very young child might not have it at all. Yes?

Same Student: Certainly for most people you could say that if he didn't see that a certain sort of action would hurt another person or, not if he didn't see it, but if he saw that it would hurt another person and said "So what?," we would call him morally blind or something like this. But wouldn't you say that for some people, at least, most of these moral judgments are capable of being based on a more rational ground, or perhaps—

LS: Yes, but it is not necessary that the individual should be able to state these grounds. Well, take a simple case: You talk to a man and you see he is incapable of any consideration other than what will be conducive to his earning money. Have you seen such people? I mean, there are such people. And you see he is completely incapable of any other consideration: that something might be good for the country, or something

might be good from any other, broader point of view, they are completely unable to do that. This can surely be spelled out in the form of a proposition: Money is the highest good. And if this, if it is stated in the form of a proposition, you can of course go into it rationally and ask the question[s]: Why do we have money? What is the function, the purpose of money? And does not the understanding of the purpose of money show you that money cannot possibly be the greatest good? Then you find that this is not a very profound and far-fetched thing. People sometimes say of another man: Well, he's amassing money, but he cannot take it with him. You may have heard that expression. There is something very profound implied in that; this can be spelled out. I am sure that these things can and must be spelled out to have their full evidence, but it is not necessary for us in daily life to have it fully spelled out. Our shock about a man of atrocious meanness is of course based on some reasonings which we are not necessarily able to fully develop at the moment and perhaps have never taken the trouble to develop, and yet we can say [of] the man who has this narrowness [that] he sees only the value of money, and [of] another, who sees also the value, say, of genuine friendship—I would say that the second man is surely a wider [man], a more competent man in human matters than the first. This I would say without going into any deeper question. And to that extent, we can leave it at this simple question of human competence. I fully agree with you that these things must be spelled out, and the only way to spell them out is to say what the purpose of a certain line of action—if not of a whole way of life—is, and see whether it makes sense to say for any man that this is the highest good. For any man. Yes?

Student: Could not one say, in criticism of your criticism of positivism, that just like an inarticulate police chief who can't explain penal theory very well but can run a very good department, these modern-day positivists are not very deep or articulate, and they can be easily destroyed, but what they produce under that seeming theory is significant? And so really you're attacking a straw man, and not the real substance of their work.

LS: Very well, it could be. But I would say this: there is a great difference between a police chief—especially in a smaller place, because here we have Orlando Wilson, and he's a professor himself [laughter]; and professors, university people, academicians, they are supposed to *know* what they are doing, to be able to give a theoretical account of what they do.[xxi] A police chief may be excellent, he may have an unfailing smell of who is a crook and who is not, and he may be wholly unable to give an account of that; and that's very good, because no defendant will be punished on the police chief's merely saying so. There must be proof, naturally, and therefore it is immensely helpful if you have men who have such wonderful instincts. But in science, in all rational pursuits, these kinds of instincts are not sufficient. And in addition, it is truly a question whether the political views generally favored by the general run of political scientists, of this kind of political scientist, are good. That is a question.

[xxi] Orlando Wilson was superintendent of the Chicago Police Department at the time. Earlier he had taught at Harvard and Berkeley. Wilson became professor of police administration at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1939 and served as the dean of the university's School of Criminology from 1950 to 1960.

Same Student: Well, to your first point, can't one answer: Well, that happens to be a characteristic of the American people, [that] they're not very theoretical, and political scientists are American people, as de Tocqueville described them, so they have that defect, but that's the price of a little democracy. Now the second point—

LS: Yes, there is something—this I could say: If they did not raise claims as theoreticians, I would entirely agree with you. But they raise these claims.

Same Student: I don't see which ones you're referring to, but the ones I have taken never raised that claim. That's why they weren't worth studying in the first place.

LS: Well, of course it would be very indelicate to mention names. [Laughter] But let us take a man who is, I believe, now regarded as *the* greatest, most influential American political scientist: that's Harold Lasswell.[xxii] He surely raises a claim to be a theorist, and he has said these things more than once.[31] I mean, this doctrine exists and is powerfully represented by a whole literature, in all kinds of books, pamphlets, and courses, and must therefore be faced.[32] That must be done.

Same Student: So once you've faced it, even if you've won the battle, you still have to deal with their work, with their production, their publications, as—[33]

LS: No, I believe it is not so negligible because this would, I believe, also show in the so-called empirical studies which they make. Because the value of an empirical study does not depend entirely upon whether it is exactly done according to all prescriptions of scientific logic; it depends also upon the relevance of the study. This depends on the values.

Same Student: Well, take a look at the great advance we have since Sigmund Freud's day, to take just one example—the curing[34] [or] bringing back to competence people who are mentally incompetent.

LS: Yes, that is an infinite question into which I cannot go, because the question arises immediately: Are not these kinds of incompetencies a product of the same society which produced Freud? This raises a question, whether the incompetencies which existed a hundred years ago—could [they] have been taken care of adequately by Freud? That is a moot question. That is a long question, we cannot take this for granted. And one could also say some other things about that. All right.

Student: It seems that a radical social scientist might grant that facts are value-constituted, and that the selection of his material proceeds more or less from a bias, from an evaluative bias of some kind. And what I'm asking is, is your criticism[35] directed more to their effects in practical, everyday political life, or to their methodology?

[xxii] Harold Lasswell (1902–1978) was a leading member of the behavioralist school of social science in the United States.

LS: Well, one surely cannot disregard what the implications of their doctrine [are], if it is taken seriously. If it is not taken seriously, as our friend just said, well, that is all right, but we must reckon with the possibility that it is taken seriously, [36]what its social or moral effect is. But as for the question which you raise, that is complicated. I mean, what is generally admitted by the men who work in these things is this: that the distinction between relevance and irrelevance presupposes values. I mean, what is important and unimportant, what is relevant and irrelevant, presupposes values. So if a man writes a study on this particular subject rather than on that, an empirical study, there is a value involved. But what they say is this: That is uninteresting because what we are concerned with is that *after* he has chosen his subject, no evaluation enters there, so if he says [that] X is the cause of Y, there is no evaluation which enters here. The difficulty is rather this: whether there are not certain subjects, scholarly subjects, which are constituted by value judgments and which do not make sense without them.[37] [Take] this example, which I take also from Max Weber. Max Weber asserted—I am not interested in whether it is right or wrong, it is only an example—that Puritanism had a bad effect, a deleterious effect, on music in England. Now this proposition is of any interest only because of certain assumptions: (a) that Puritanism is a form of religion which is very high; and (b) that there was music of a high order in England before, which was destroyed under the influence of Puritanism. The highness of Puritanism and the lowness of the music coming from Puritanism are essential for the phrasing of the question, because if there were, say, a low and mean superstition which issued in the production of very low and mean music, that's a different phenomenon. The value judgments are essential to the definition, to the scholarly definition, of the subject matter. Now I will take this up next time, when I will discuss the question of whether it is possible to understand social phenomena without making value judgments, so in other words, disregarding entirely the practical question of what the effect of this kind of social science on moral evaluations is, but whether it is possible as a purely theoretical pursuit. I believe you had a question, and I was deflected by these other students.

Ms. Barnett: Yes. There are branches of the social sciences . . . which say[38] that the last assumption they make is that their propositions are falsifiable in principle. Now if you have this kind of social scientist, someone operating in this country, even though his reason for choosing the study and the evaluations he makes may be questionable, it is possible the *data itself*—going back to . . . 's question—is acceptable and can be used later on; it seems that the problem, as someone in the back pointed out, is that if you're trying to use the social scientist as . . . or someone who goes ahead and assumes that certain values are better than other values . . . how would you act, if you wanted to get policy from either kind of study? Because one kind of value is not communicable. For example, if a human being is not competent to understand a certain value or disagrees with it, it seems that when you get down to the basic assumption, there's just a disagreement and that's all you can say, whereas on the other kind of study, when you get to the basic assumption you can say: Well, I have falsified a principle here. You can falsify. You sense that there's a difference here that leads to action. Or not-action.

LS: Yes, but this was a very long statement, and would you do me a favor and write it up and hand it in to me next time at the beginning of the lecture? Please do that, because I would have to ask you to repeat it, and it is rather late now.

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[1] Deleted “asked me.”
[2] Deleted “to think”
[3] Deleted “This is—in our age that school which still maintains this old, simple-minded view: that truth is the adequation of intellect and thing.” Moved “this old, simple-minded view that truth is the adequation of intellect and thing.”
[4] Deleted “it.”
[5] Deleted “If.”
[6] Deleted “of.”
[7] Deleted “men.”
[8] Moved “be.”
[9] Deleted “there is something.”
[10] Deleted “is.”
[11] Deleted “of.”
[12] Deleted “This is.”
[13] Deleted “This cannot.”
[14] Deleted “Locke.”
[15] Deleted “was concerned.”
[16] Deleted “seems”
[17] Deleted “without.”
[18] Deleted “that.”
[19] Deleted “as to.”
[20] Deleted “Surely Simmel says.”
[21] Deleted “yes?”
[22] Deleted “did not.”
[23] Deleted “they would say.”
[24] Deleted “and.”
[25] Deleted “they got”
[26] Deleted “because”
[27] Deleted “you know?”
[28] Deleted “does.”
[29] Moved “again.”
[30] Deleted “than.”
[31] Deleted “Otherwise it would be.”
[32] Deleted “Even if it were.”
[33] Deleted “Yes, but the question is still.”
[34] Deleted “of people who are mentally—in.”
[35] Deleted “is.”
[36] Deleted “and”
[37] Deleted “Now for example.”
[38] Deleted “that when the get.”

Session 4: January 18, 1965

Value-Free Social Science: Weber

Leo Strauss: Now you were the one with—here is this question:[i] "Karl Popper claims that science can be separated from nonscience on nonverificationist principles, and agrees that the verificationist separation is untenable. If this claim is true, it would mean that a value-free social science was possible." Well, in the first place I must say: What does "verificationist" mean? No, honestly, I do not know. I simply do not know what it means, and therefore I do not see the connection between this assertion and the possibility or impossibility of a value-free science in general, or social science in particular. Could[1] you explain to us what it means?

Ms. Barnett: Well, verificationists simply say,[2] if someone presents a proposition—"All crows are black" is the standard one—if someone presents a proposition, and a verificationist were asked: "How do you know?"[3] This, according to the Popperian, leads to an infinite regress. And he says that at the end of this infinite regress, according to their philosophy, is their answer, which is: Well, I don't know, but I will only ask questions that are in principle falsifiable.

LS: I see. Well, does it not amount to this, ultimately: that the attempt to reject certain questions as meaningless, as distinguished from untrue, begs the question? You know, when the question is raised, these so-called metaphysical questions regarding the Whither and the Where, as Comte puts it—and they cannot be answered by science, admittedly. And then the question arises: But are these not the most important concerns of man, and is therefore science not of a very limited value? Then one can try to get rid of this difficulty by saying these questions cannot be answered by science, but for this very reason they are meaningless questions. So you see, then you have solved the problem by definition, i.e., completely arbitrarily.[4] Popper rejects that, probably. [And] what he means by this, "science can be separated from nonscience on nonverificationist principles," [5]I simply do not know and therefore I cannot answer your question. Perhaps you will spell it out for us next time? It will do you well.

Ms. Barnett: Well, it's a long—a five-hundred-page book.

LS: Yes, but still the main point should be—I mean, I know Popper's position in a general way from some of his publications, but I could not[6]—

Ms. Barnett: . . .

LS: Yes, I know, Popper takes the ordinary view, or the ordinary positivistic view, but he is more careful than some of the other writers of this kind around. But the difficulty in Popper comes in rather another way: that he tries to establish his position, his frankly

[i] See Strauss's remarks at the end of the preceding session.

value position, i.e., not his scientific position, regarding permissive egalitarianism by attacking the men opposed to it, such people as Plato, Hegel, etc. But in doing that he proceeds in a most unscholarly manner, i.e., in a most unscientific manner, and therefore there is something very awkward if someone whose principle is science is unable to behave scientifically when it counts. This is my objection to Popper.

Ms. Barnett: Is this *ad hominem*?[7]

LS: In a way, sure, it is a mere accident. But I believe the question is whether there is not a deeper necessity for that, I mean, whether the lacking concern for understanding these positions is not due to the fundamental certainty that this[8]—say, Plato—that this *cannot* be true as Plato meant it, because Plato meant it as scientifically or objectively true. He doesn't take the necessary trouble of studying it. That is a bit more complex. Let us disregard Karl Popper altogether, since the relevant point to which you referred has not become clear to me, and I suppose to no one else. Or is there someone who knows these things of Popper and would like to take them up?

Ms. Barnett: Do you mean, what he means by "verificationist"?

LS: Yes, what this issue is, "science can be separated from nonscience on nonverificationist principles."

Ms. Barnett: Oh, I see. Well, he would call Comte a verificationist in that, in the end, if you were to ask Comte the question "How do you know this?," Comte would have to say: I know this by common sense or by empirical studies. So[9] this, to Karl Popper, is verificationist and this leads to an infinite regress. That's what he means by "verification."

LS: And where do we begin, then? I mean, how do we avoid that infinite regress?

Ms. Barnett: Well, according to him, you avoid it by saying at the end: Well, I don't know. All I can say is that it can be falsifiable. Any propositions that are not falsifiable he won't deal with. He'll only deal with propositions that are falsifiable, so he'll say to the person that he's talking with: Well, help me falsify it.

LS: But without saying that nothing—

Ms. Barnett: He believes that most theories and propositions are false indeed, and that science proceeds by falsifying these theories. But what he'll say is: I don't know, and it remains to be falsified.

LS: Well, I suggest[10] that you give us a somewhat more detailed report about it. Unfortunately I do not have the time now to read it. Good.

Now I have spoken of the crucial change which positivism has undergone after Comte: the realization that science or reason is unable to substantiate value judgments. Social

science cannot settle conflicts between fundamentally different preferences. When considering Comte, we saw that science must leave open the questions raised by theology and metaphysics—in Comte's formulation, the questions regarding the Why as distinguished from the How—and that this fact endangers the claim of science to be *the* guide of men, a claim which Comte raises on behalf of science,[11] and endangers the claim of science to take the place formerly occupied by theology and metaphysics. That claim of science to be the guide is still more endangered, of course, in the moment in which science becomes value-free, because we may conceivably turn our backs to the question of the Why or Where and Whither [but] we cannot well turn our backs to the question of how we should live, how we should act.

Now the practical consequence of this exinanition of science is what has been called the flight from scientific reason to something else, whatever that may be, which claims to give men guidance. I think that is a fact, but it is concealed from one by the following state of affairs, a state of affairs which creates the delusion that a value-free social science can nevertheless guide us. Now take the simple example supplied by the present situation, the last elections. President Johnson's program is based on certain values, which from the point of view of social science are as good or as bad as any others, say, they are as good or as bad as those of Senator Goldwater.[ii] But only the values cherished by Johnson have a sufficiently powerful political appeal, as was shown by the election—or are in step with the times: the argument that Senator Goldwater has horse-and-buggy values and therefore [values] of no real interest. Now if we broaden the spectrum somewhat and go much beyond the United States, we have seen that fascism has failed completely, and of Marxism one can very well say that while it has been conspicuously successful in some respects, it is theoretically or scientifically wrong. The great conservative statesmen in our age, Churchill and de Gaulle, failed in the decisive point. Churchill had said: "I have not become His Majesty's prime minister in order to supervise the liquidation of the British Empire," and de Gaulle said similar things about Algeria. And look what has happened.[iii]

In brief, to summarize this kind of thing which you all know: merely factual considerations of what is possible, and politically possible *now*, decide in favor of what is now called the liberal line. That means, however, that science, value-free science, decides in favor of liberalism. This is one important part in our present situation. And from this point of view, the social science relativism regarding the values is a purely scholastic or academic affair which has no practical meaning. It is perfectly possible to take this view. But we must see the question is only this: Granted that this is the wave of the future, and therefore the question of whether it is good or bad cannot arise because you cannot do anything against the wave of the future, the question is whether this difficulty does not raise its ugly head in [another way].

[ii] The candidates in the presidential election of 1964 were the incumbent President Lyndon B. Johnson (Democrat) and Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona (Republican).

[iii] Decolonization in the British Empire began with the independence of India in 1947. Algeria gained its independence from France in 1962.

Now I would like first to read to you an old passage, which you will see has some relevance, but perhaps not sufficient relevance. Very briefly, what people think today, many people, is this: We know where the development goes. The nuclear war is an insanity, and unless some insane individual like Hitler [comes][iv] to power somewhere, there will not be the nuclear war. This will be avoided. Surely the Russian system will become more liberal, [demands for] consumer goods[12] will make themselves felt, and, on the other hand, the West will become more socialistic. And we can see that even China will eventually mollify, because this will not always . . . And so there is a development in front of us which is both obviously possible, and perhaps more than possible, and in addition absolutely sensible. There is no problem, no fundamental problem.

Now the first passage which I [will] read to you is from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, near the beginning. Zarathustra addresses the multitude:

"'One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves.
"'Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the *last man*.
"'"What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?" thus asks the last man, and he blinks.
"'The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small. His race is as ineradicable as the flea-beetle; the last man lives longest.
"'"We have invented happiness," say the last men, and they blink. They have left the regions where it was hard to live, for one needs warmth. One still loves one's neighbor and rubs against him, for one needs warmth.
"'Becoming sick and harboring suspicion are sinful to them: one proceeds carefully. A fool, whoever still stumbles over stones or human beings! A little poison now and then: that makes for agreeable dreams. And much poison in the end, for an agreeable death.
"'One still works, for work is a form of entertainment. But one is careful lest the entertainment be too harrowing. One no longer becomes poor or rich: both require too much exertion. Who still wants to rule? Who obey? Both require too much exertion.
"No shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse.
"'"Formerly, all the world was mad," say the most refined, and they blink.
"One is clever and knows everything that has ever happened: so there is no end of derision. One still quarrels, but one is soon reconciled—else it might spoil the digestion.
"'One has one's little pleasure for the day and one's little pleasure for the night: but one has a regard for health.
"'"We have invented happiness," say the last men, and they blink.'"[v]

[iv] Strauss says "will ever come"

[v] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Prologue, § 5. Strauss reads from Walter Kaufmann's translation, available in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), 129–30.

Now this is Nietzsche's formula for what looks so very different in the communists', especially in Marx's own, presentation. Nietzsche says, although he didn't know Marx—disgraceful, [that] he didn't know him—he says as it were [that] what Marx regards as his final state of the communist society, as the society of the highest culture: *this* is what you in fact will get. Now we all know that there is some little element of truth in what Nietzsche says. Some things which we know from our time make it worse. For example, he says those who feel different go into a lunatic asylum. We know that is not necessary, we just go to a psychiatrist, we don't have to take this extreme step. But in other respects, Nietzsche doubtless exaggerates from every point of view.

I would like to read you a statement from a present-day sociologist, an American sociologist, who is very far from the extremism of Nietzsche.[13] This is Professor Nathan Glazer.[vi] In a discussion which is not printed but which I am sure he would permit me to use, he speaks of the most successful revolution of our age, "the organizational revolution, or the scientific revolution," and its implications. Through this revolution the gap between "the intellectuals," "the radical and liberal critics," on the one hand, and the organizations "representing the status quo" (say, the War Department) has been closed or at least very much narrowed. The reason was that the intellectuals proved to possess "new techniques for making organizations more efficient." One might say that in proportion as the scientists drew all conclusions from their basic premise, which is the assertion that science is limited to "factual" assertions as distinguished from "value" assertions, they lost the right to be radical critics of institutions and became the willing servants of any institutions. Does it not make sense? I mean, in order to be a radical critic, you have to have values which you can defend intellectually. Yet, strangely, the cooperation of scientists and men of affairs (including generals) has affected the "values" of the latter, so that one begins to wonder whether there is not a preestablished harmony between the allegedly value-free science and the liberal values. Be this as it may, the question which troubles Professor Glazer is whether the society rendered possible by the cooperation of the scientists and the managers—the society guaranteeing to everyone "simple justice and simple freedom"—can be regarded as[14] a good society. I quote: "Both conservatives or reactionaries, on the one hand, and intellectuals and radicals and anarchists on the other, often come together in opposition to what we might call establishment Liberalism."

Both the reactionary and the intellectual question the claim of the welfare state—"the whole organization, the machine for doing good"—to be the good society. Glazer sees only one way out: "to improve the organization" by setting up "the great organization" or "the big organization" or "the determining center of allocation," which is enabled to direct all other organizations because it "will have far more information and will make much better diagnoses" than anyone else can. Hence it will be "the good *big* society." But this is a solution not for Mr. Glazer. Alongside it, he predicts "there will be developing good *small* societies," composed "of reactionaries and anarchists and radical

[vi] Nathan Glazer (1924–2019), influential sociologist, editor, and policy advisor; coauthor of *The Lonely Crowd* (1950). This paragraph reproduces almost verbatim Strauss's remarks in "Perspectives on the Good Society," *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 271–72.

intellectuals."[vii] But he is not sure whether "the organization will be tolerant enough to let them be," nor whether "they will be clever enough to evade it."

This is a statement of the problem with which you are all familiar,[15] namely, that this solution, which seems to be so self-evident and demanded by "simple justice and simple freedom,"[16] will not necessarily lead to what is ordinarily know as conformism, the destruction of all human originality. That is of course what Nietzsche meant when he spoke of that star in the *Zarathustra*. So in other words, however plausible the view that "Look around! For a serious and sober man, there is no question, we know what is coming and no one can object to it, no one can complain about it," yet if one thinks a little bit deeper, one sees that it is not so, and therefore the value question arises again.

Now last time I began a discussion of the value-free social science, and I would like now to continue that. I would now like to raise the question: Is it possible to understand social phenomena without evaluating? I do not deny that you can understand some social phenomena without evaluating them; that is not the point. But when we speak of social science we think of course of all possible subjects of social science, and the question is, therefore: Is it possible to understand all social phenomena without at any time evaluating? In other words, I am not concerned now with the practical consequence. I take it for granted that social science is a merely theoretical science. Can it fulfill its theoretical function of understanding social phenomena without evaluating?

Now the general answer would be no, because social phenomena are all of a purposeful character, and therefore they as it were demand to be judged in terms of the purpose which they are meant to serve. This kind of immanent evaluation, as we might call it, [namely], Given this purpose, does it fulfill the purpose? is inevitable. The question arises whether the immanent evaluation does not necessarily turn into an absolute evaluation, and not for an accidental reason. For example,[17] let [18][us] start from very obvious facts: the analysis of the last election. It is absolutely impossible to say anything relevant about the last election without speaking of the ineptness of certain men in the running and the nonineptness of others. This value judgment—if you don't use that, you don't say anything—Senator Goldwater stepped on every toe, one can say, and on the other hand, the handling of the Bobby Baker case was too obviously clever.[viii] I mean, these are value judgments, whether we like it or not. But these merely immanent evaluations take on an absolute significance for the very simple reason that the beings judged are not merely running for president—or maybe generals, or dogcatchers, what does it matter—but they are all *human beings*! While it is entirely voluntary, in a sense, whether you run for president or general or dogcatcher or some other kind of catcher, it is not voluntary for you to be a human being. You are subject to[19] [the] standard implied in that without any possibility of avoiding it. The beings judged are men, and[20] [there] are virtues and vices of men. A man who regards war as unqualifiedly bad must make a distinction

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[vii] In *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (p. 272) Glazer is quoted so: "'there will be developing . . . good small societies' composed 'of reactionaries and anarchists and radical intellectuals.'"

[viii] Bobby Baker was a Senate staffer and associate of President Johnson whose alleged corruption the Goldwater team attempted to exploit in campaign ads throughout 1964.

nevertheless between a good and a bad general if he writes military history, but regarding war as thoroughly bad, he must mean the distinction between a good and bad general like the distinction between a good and bad thief, because here too we have a distinction. But nevertheless, if he is not completely narrow, he must see a difference between the cause to which the thief applies his resourcefulness and the cause to which the good general applies his resourcefulness, or rather the absence of a cause in the one case, in the case of the thief, and the presence of a cause in the other.

Fundamentally, one can state this as follows. We are concerned with political things. What is political? A hard question. But we can answer it etymologically or, if you please, from the point of view of an earlier age. "Political" is a derivative from the Greek word *polis*, the nearest equivalent to which is probably "commonwealth," the English word "commonwealth." Now a commonwealth has a purpose—it is controversial what that purpose is, but that it is meant to fulfill a purpose is granted. The standards for judging political things are inherent in political things as political things for this very reason. There are very great difficulties here, [and] it suffices to think of the difference between Aristotle and Locke regarding the purpose of civil society or of the commonwealth. But that in which Aristotle and Locke agree is very frequently sufficient for political judgment.[21] We do not always have to raise the most fundamental questions; we can remain sometimes in a more limited horizon. Judgments in this sphere are solid enough, despite the fact that they remain within an area surrounded by darkness. As Aristotle in his wisdom puts it occasionally: "to speak politically and crudely."[ix] To speak politically means to speak crudely, not to make very refined distinctions which have no political relevance.

An example: when Plato presents, in the first book of the *Republic*, this old gentleman Cephalus, I think everyone likes that very nice old man and everyone would wish to have such a grandfather. He is very nice, educated, reasonably delicate, and in addition also reasonably wealthy, which is always a good quality for a grandfather to have. [Laughter] Now then, when you read more carefully and follow Plato's presentation and therewith begin to use the x-rays with which Plato looks through Cephalus, we come to see that this wonderful gentleman has a very seamy side. Now Plato analyzes that—I mean, he still makes him a perfectly nice man for all practical purposes, but *only* for all practical purposes. [Laughter] Now Plato has a theory of what he does, namely, that true virtue as distinguished from this more superficial virtue requires a conversion, a conversion of the whole man, and this conversion Cephalus has never undergone. Plato speaks of that at the end of the *Republic*: the nice gentleman brought up well and decently who yet chooses at the beginning of the next life the life of a tyrant, meaning the most unjust life, precisely because he has not undergone this conversion which according to Plato can be brought about only by philosophy.[x]

Now let us take a very simple example. A man, a sociologist, writes a sociology of art, (a) in general or (b) in particular. And then someone reads it and sees that the paintings, or whatever it is which he has discussed, are all trash. There is some impossibility in that.

[ix] E.g., *Politics* 3.1275b25.

[x] *Republic* 619b–e.

He should have called it a sociology of trash, say, of the 1920s, and not sociology of art. But what is that distinction between art and trash but a value distinction? A sense of quality, as art historians say, is a prerequisite for being a competent student of art and therefore [also] a sociologist of art. Similar things apply to all other parts of the social sciences. Let us take another case which surely falls within the province of any special social science and therefore of political science in particular. As you know, political scientists, once they have reached a certain age, are supposed to publish. As the maxim goes: "Publish or perish." Now, they publish [laughter], naturally, because they prefer life to death. But after they have published, something will happen which is ultimately as important as the publication—an old hand tells you that—namely, there will be a review. And if the poor fellow cannot bring publications together with a series of reviews which are favorable, he may be worse off than if he had not published at all. Now in these reviews we find such statements as "perceptive," "penetrating," "imaginative," "deep," "broad," etc., and very rightly, because these words indicate the standards with which a scientist or scholar is meant to comply. Naturally, not everyone can apply them properly (that is the great difficulty regarding the objectivity of reviews, and for that matter of science altogether), because you need judgment. And someone might find a certain observation very profound which is in fact very shallow. There is no protection and no guarantee for that; this vicious circle cannot be overcome. And needless to say,[22] this is one of the great secrets of university life, because all appointments are made on the assumption that the appointers are competent. And how is competence to be judged? Ultimately by very external criteria: you have published, you can lecture, and so on and so on. Very difficult. But I am not concerned with this [question] now.[23] I am concerned only with this. When people make these statements on scholarly productions, they mean, as value-free social scientists say, only this: if scholarship, then good scholarship. But why *scholarship*? So in other words, this is a merely immanent evaluation. I choose, for God knows what reason but surely not for rational reasons, scholarship, and then if I have chosen it, then I am subject to the immanent standards. But this is simply not true to the facts, because when we look at such statements or make such statements, we observe that we admire these qualities *simply*. If we see that someone is perceptive, we mean more than: Since he has chosen to be a scholar, he ought to be perceptive. We mean more: there is a quality of a human being that will show also in entirely different fields of endeavor than scholarship. And the principle, again, to repeat: every human phenomenon and every human being is subject to being judged in terms of what is a good human being—and good in the widest sense, not only moral in the narrow sense of the term.[24] A man may be a good man in the moral sense of the word without being perceptive, perhaps, but we mean a good man in the full sense of all the human virtues and vices.

Now to come back to the question of how a social science would look which would completely avoid value judgments: I would like to illustrate this by an example. Social science must of course use concepts, articulate its subject matter in the light of concepts. One very famous one, found or invented by Max Weber (Max Weber being the most outstanding representative of the fact-value distinction), is the distinction between the various kinds of authority: rational, traditional, and charismatic.[25] Let me take another, more recent example, not as important but still revealing: for some time people used,

especially at the Hoover Library in Stanford,[xi] the distinction between the democratic and the authoritarian personality: strictly value-free. But if you read that, you saw that it was very value-loaded. The democratic personality was obviously a nice man, and the authoritarian was just an ogre! [Laughter] Not for one moment did they make the attempt to see that there could be an authoritarian personality, say, a father or grandfather, old-style, who might be quite annoying from time to time but could also be very good as a guide for young people, and so on and so forth. But the Max Weber case is much more interesting.

Now I [will] read to you from the English translation of Max Weber's *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, translated by Henderson and Talcott Parsons.

"The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin [of course, social scientists cannot say whether they are or are not of divine origin, but they are regarded as of divine origin—LS] or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader. In primitive circumstances this peculiar kind of deference is paid to prophets, to people with a reputation for therapeutic or legal wisdom, to leaders in the hunt, and heroes in war. It is very often thought of as resting on magical powers. How the quality in question would be ultimately judged from any ethical, aesthetical, or other such point of view is naturally entirely indifferent for purposes of definition [because the social scientist doesn't judge from an ethical or aesthetic point of view—LS].

"What alone is important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his 'followers' or 'disciples.'

"For present purposes it will be necessary to treat a variety of different types as being endowed with charisma in this sense. It includes the state of a 'berserker' whose spells of maniac passion have, apparently wrongly, sometimes been attributed to the use of drugs. In Medieval Byzantium a group of people endowed with this type of charismatic war-like passion were maintained as a kind of weapon. It includes the 'shaman,' the kind of magician who in the pure type is subject to epileptoid seizures as a means of falling into trances. Another type is that of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, who, however, cannot be classified in this way with absolute certainty since there is a possibility that he was a very sophisticated type of deliberate swindler."[xii]

Now what do you say to that? To the honor or dishonor of Max Weber, I have to say that this passage is mistranslated. Parsons apparently hadn't understood at that time what

[xi] The Hoover war collection of materials, which Henry Hoover began to collect while he was organizing humanitarian relief for Belgium, was established in 1919 as a library and archives at Stanford University.

[xii] Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. and trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 358–59.

Weber's value-free social science was. Weber says, in effect, that *it doesn't make any difference* whether he was a swindler or not. In other words, the difference between a fake charisma and true charisma is already a value judgment and therefore has no place in social science. But one can rightly say that while it is a bad translation, it implies a sound criticism: the question must be raised, and for the very simple reason[26] [that] social science, if it is to be worth its salt, can never leave it at finding out how an authority is *regarded* by its followers. If a society is subject to a fundamental delusion and regards legal fictions as literally true, then it is the first duty of the social scientist to say that people were fooled about the character of the authority to which they were subject—the minimal critical duty of social science. Max Weber himself called the kind of constitutional monarchy which existed in Germany until 1918 sham constitutionalism. In other words, he said: This is not a truly constitutional monarchy, but a barely disguised absolute monarchy. I will not go now into the substantive truth of this assertion; the main point is that such distinctions are of course necessary for the social scientist to make: Is this a genuine constitutional government or only a sham? The kind of authority in a given group is to be determined by what the people concerned regard as authority. [But] it is impossible to leave it at that. It means literally passing the buck to people who may very well be less competent than the intelligent social scientist to judge whether the authority under question is genuine or a sham.

In addition, this whole doctrine of the kinds of authority suffers, I think, from a very grave defect. Naturally Weber didn't know anything of Hitler, although Hitler would really have to be classified as a charismatic leader in Weber's sense. But would this be sufficient? Would this be adequate, fundamentally adequate? Is it not in every case necessary, apart from these formal characteristics, to ask, regarding political legitimacy, as regards the cause which is the basis even of the claim of the charismatic leader? Hitler was elected and had this tremendous intra-German success, not merely because he had immense rhetorical and demagogic and other gifts of this kind, but also on the basis of what he stood for, what he called National Socialism. Can you disregard that when you speak of what legitimacy meant at that time in Germany? Without this cause, all his charisma would not have been helpful to him.

I would like to add another point here, namely—and[27] [this] has been observed by more than one reader of Weber—that in Weber's theory of charisma, rational, and traditional authority, there is a value judgment implied, although obscure. Of course, Weber did not start with phenomena like Joseph Smith and so forth. He took this conception from Christianity, and especially from a certain Protestant lawyer, Sohm.[xiii] Weber used the expression "the routinization of charisma," by which he implies that the original leader, who has this profound impact on people because of his particular gifts—on this basis the social order cannot last for any length of time, and there must be some substitute for it: the routinization of charisma. And according to Weber, this has taken place especially in the Christian Church, when Jesus and the Apostles were followed by the organized Church. But the very term "routinization," whatever Weber might say, implies a value judgment: routine versus charisma.

[xiii] Rudolph Sohm (1841–1917), German theologian, jurist, and historian of law.

A last point which I would like to mention in this connection is this. The value judgments which are strictly forbidden by the ruling doctrine: they may not enter the front door, they come in by the back door. Because there is one discipline (not necessarily belonging to social science but affecting it very plainly) called psychiatry, and here the distinction between well-adjusted and ill-adjusted people enters, which is naturally understood and meant as a value judgment, whatever the pedantic and strict methodologies of the social sciences might say in a given case. I would say the only difference between such a value judgment[28] [as] "well-adjusted" and "ill-adjusted," compared with "good" and "bad," is only that it is very poor—there are perhaps situations in which it is good to be ill-adjusted. I mean, if a child comes from an abominable home, the worse he is adjusted to that home, the better for him, even if he has to go through quite some troubles. So it is a very narrow, unthought-through thing. Incidentally, I happen to know of one psychiatrist at least who claims that the distinction between adjusted and ill-adjusted, or sane and insane people, is also not scientific, because it is a value judgment and must be treated as such because what is sanity and insanity is differently understood in different cultures, and therefore we must even avoid that. Ultimately this would of course lead also to the abandonment of the distinction between healthy and sick in medicine or in biology. There will be an occasion to come back to this later. I turn now to another consideration which has to do with the question of value-free social science.

Value-free social science is distinguished from, and ultimately opposed to, prescientific political understanding, what we loosely[29] call common sense, because common sense dealing with political or social matters of course evaluates all the time. Value-free social science questions common sense and therewith follows a great tradition. The famous example: Copernicus's refutation of common sense. Here we see how poor common sense is compared to the scientific approach, and what worked so well in astronomy, physics, etc., must also be done in the social sciences. Common sense evaluates. For common sense, the judgments "X has been in politics for forty years" and "X is a corrupt politician" have the same cognitive status. I mean, there is no logical difference from a commonsense point of view. Now the radical questioning of common sense is of course not the work of men like Copernicus, but above all by Descartes, Descartes who begins the whole philosophic-scientific enterprise with his universal doubt. Literally understood, he must doubt of everything. And something of this doubt is still visible in present-day social science when people want to have scientific proof for every assertion. Of course, this cannot be taken quite literally. For example, that there are presidential elections every four years: if a political scientist makes this assertion, no proof will be demanded from him. This is equally well known to common sense and to scientific political science. The important point here is this (it is a simple example): that by being used in science, the statement, or the truth, or whatever you call it, does not undergo any change whatsoever. So common sense is capable of knowing the truth. This example shows even that science depends on commonsense knowledge. That dependence can be shown most simply, and also universally, by the following consideration.

Political science deals with certain activities of human beings. As such it presupposes that we have awareness of human beings as human beings, [30][to state it] simply, that we are able to tell human beings from other beings—from trees, dogs, stars, or what have you.

Now when a sociologist in a sociology department or, for that matter, a political scientist in a political science department is sent out with questionnaires to ask people about how they think about this or that subject, very detailed statements, and in the ideal case, so that not the slightest possibility of a misunderstanding by the poor student is possible, very well. But one thing they are not told: how to tell a human being from a nonhuman being, how to know that they should[31] ask this being here and not this [one], and how to distinguish them. Well, they learned this of course in their seminars. [Laughter] No! They didn't learn it in their seminars. They didn't learn it in the college, not in high school, and not in elementary school. Where did they learn it? How did they learn it? I don't know. Most of us would say: I don't know. But we all know that we know it.

Now this little thing on which the whole enterprise absolutely depends is not scientifically known, and yet, as I said, [it is] the basis of the whole enterprise. Political science stands and falls by the truth of the prescientific awareness of political things. The question arises, of course: How are we aware of that truth? How do we become aware of this fundamental distinction to which I referred, between man and nonman? Do we in fact become aware of something, or is this not rather a convention of sorts, embodied in our language, and by learning language we become initiated into that convention?

Now this question of how[32] we know that, there is a name for this kind of question, which I'm sure you have heard: that's an *epistemological* question, a question regarding the theory of knowledge. This is a very important and highly respected part of modern philosophy. There is, however, one difficulty. Every epistemology, of whichever persuasion, presupposes the truth of empirical statements. We try to understand how it is possible that such a thing as perceiving things or perceiving people is possible. There are all kinds of theories about [33][it], yet our perceiving things and people is more manifest and more reliable than any theory of knowledge, any explanation of how our perceiving things and people is possible. The truth of any theory of knowledge depends on its ability to give an adequate account of that perception presupposed to be true. It depends on its ability to give an adequate account of this fundamental reliance which we have. When I say: "I see here a young man," and perhaps give a more detailed description, there is no question about it that we are all in this room, 122. The fact that we know that is more evident, more manifest, more reliable, than any explanation of it, because any explanation presupposes that we are, and that we know we are, now in room 122.

I use the word "reliance," which is the literal translation (and in this case the best translation, I think) of the Platonic expression for the strange state of things that we know without knowing necessarily how or why we know. When Plato describes [the various forms of knowing], in the famous discussion[34] in the sixth and seventh books of the *Republic*, [xiv] there is one stage which he calls in one version sense perception, which has here a wide meaning, like our knowing that we are here, for example. And he calls it, in the parallel, reliance—this, our sense of knowledge of things and people, has the character of such a fundamental reliance.[35] What Plato implies [can be stated as follows]: We are in the midst of things. We cannot begin with a clean slate, using only perfectly

[xiv] Strauss apparently has in mind the simile of the line at *Republic* 509d–511e and its recapitulation at 533b–534a. The Greek word in question is likely *pistis* (511e1, 534a1).

clear and distinct concepts. We cannot begin at the beginning, but we must try to ascend to the beginning. In other words, in dealing with human things, at any rate, we are in an entirely different situation than the mathematicians are, who do begin and may begin at the beginning. We cannot do that. There is an interesting illustration of this state of things. Spinoza was perhaps the first philosopher who tried to present a whole philosophic doctrine in mathematical form, in a book called *Ethics Demonstrated in a Geometric Manner*, beginning with axioms, postulates, etc., as Euclid had done, and especially dealing with man—the book is after all called *Ethics*. And then there is suddenly an axiom somewhere, or a postulate, which runs as follows: *Homo cogitat*, man thinks, man is a thinking being.[xv] [He] never defines man. Never defines man. This is not a mere accident. This is the essential difficulty of beginning in this manner. Now before I go on, let me first see whether I have made myself clear up to this point.[xvi]

Student: The problem is that[36] value-free social science[37] doesn't strike me as being conscious fundamentally of having a theoretic function, whereas I think the political science which begins in common sense is more conscious of fundamentally having a theoretic function. I mean, I know that value-free social science has something that it calls theory—

LS: Well, but the theory, I think, is implied in the claim that it is a science in the same way in which physics, chemistry, biology are sciences, and therefore the general notion of science which has developed in the modern centuries is their theory of science, which has to be somewhat modified (perhaps one should say rather as economics is a science, as biology and so forth).[38] No, common sense has of course no theory, as such, naturally. That is a point. But common sense can *lead* to a theory. I will discuss this later on, when I come to speak of Aristotle. But in itself, common sense has no theory.

Same Student: That's correct. But the problem that I'm trying to get at is that I think the theory, the value-free social sciences theory, is practically oriented. Because when you hear a value-free social scientist talking theoretically or abstractly, they always take their bearings from practical problems.

LS: Well, this is not necessary, because a practical statement would have this character: If you want to have this and this thing, if you want to achieve this end, you must use these and these means. But you can turn this[39] into a theoretical statement by calling the means the causes and the end the effect. Then the practical statement is transformed into a theoretical statement. Therefore, whether the practical intention is very noticeable in many cases in value-free social science is ultimately irrelevant for the fundamentally theoretical character of present-day social science. I cannot go now into this question. This is perhaps one of the deepest differences, that traditionally political science, as you know, was regarded as a practical science, not a theoretical science, and this change from a practical to a theoretical science which took place roughly in the seventeenth century is a thing which we have to consider later in this course. Yes?

[xv] Spinoza, *Ethics*, part 2, axiom 2.

[xvi] There is a break in the tape at this point.

Student: You mentioned for example that the knowledge that the election of a president occurs every four years in the United States is ascertainable both through common sense and through scientific methods. Now I'm wondering whether "quote commonsense" knowledge doesn't really depend on empirical verification in the sense that we can look back and see that every four years an election has taken place. In other words, doesn't common sense in this case, and perhaps in more cases than this, rest on empirically verifiable circumstances? For example, if a man were coming from another country, with no knowledge of the history of the United States, and [he] came to the United States this past year and saw the presidency, how Johnson succeeded[40] Kennedy, his common sense wouldn't tell him that an election would occur every four years. So doesn't this common sense rest on empirically verifiable propositions?

LS: Sure. That is perfectly true, although it is not sufficient, but as far as it goes, it is all right. But the question is this. The positivists, especially the strict ones, would say, the empirically verifiable statements are the preserve of science. To go somewhat deeper: we all[41] constantly [make] empirical statements. When I say, "We are now in room 122," it is obviously an empirical statement. But there is a difference between empirical statements and empiricistical statements—you know, between ordinary empirical statements, as men make them at all times, they've always made them, and statements complying with certain canons demanded by an empiricistic theory of knowledge. This is[42] [what] it would amount to ultimately. But[43] take the example which I gave: You are a human being; that [LS taps on the table] is not a human being. It is obviously an empirical statement. We wouldn't question its validity for one moment. But when you imply, in a way, that you cannot be certain that it's true unless you know how perception takes place and what gives it its validity, then the whole is changed. It may very well lead to the view—did you ever year of that?—called solipsism, that strictly speaking you can only say: I have a perception of these and these colors, sounds, etc., which are patterned, and this particular pattern I call a human being, and I have no right to say that this human being *is* by himself. Have you never heard of that? And according to a very powerful school now, if one wants to be strict, one cannot go beyond solipsism. This is an example of the radical change which the word "empirical" undergoes when it is taken over by certain kinds of epistemological theories. Surely there is no question that commonsense statements are empirical statements; whether this is true of all commonsense statements is another matter. Mr. Levy, you wanted to say something.

Mr. Levy: The value-free social scientist . . . does not express his opinion as to what *he* thought was good and bad, but what he was analyzing [or] studying. You have said that to understand the commonwealth, you have to understand what the commonwealth stands for, what its purpose is.

LS: Ya.

Mr. Levy: If we all agree with this, and we should, why can't the value-free social scientist remain value-free and still say: The American purpose is X, Y, and Z; the Russian purpose is A, B, C; the British purpose is C, D, E, and I will study the politics of America, Russia, and—

LS: I do not deny that within a limited sphere you may do that. But I believe [that] in the long run you cannot avoid the question [of] what the relative merit of these various definitions of the purpose are,[44] unless you are completely[45] [uninterested] in the subject. Well, then you shouldn't be a political scientist, I would say. But if you are interested in that, you are compelled to worry. Maybe you do not reach a result, but your worrying about it makes you nevertheless a better political scientist than if you did not worry about it and simply said: Well, let these fools have their prejudices, whichever they like, and I don't care about that. Your understanding even of what these people say can be deeper or shallower, obviously, and this means already to enter into the discussion, to become involved in that dialectic going on within each side as well as between the two sides. I have nothing against starting in the most modest manner—that is always wise to do; but I believe you will be dragged into that eventually, when you begin there. The lady—yes?

Ms. Barnett: If I understand what you said just now, it's a matter of determining what is the province of what political science in truth should now study, and then it becomes a conflict of views as to whether we can ascertain the knowledge of absolute values. But you haven't resolved the foundations of science, and—

LS: But I didn't speak of absolute values, but take this question—

Ms. Barnett: But that's implicitly what you're saying.

LS: I do not—

Ms. Barnett:[46] When you discussed Weber, you said that he could not help but make value judgments, and that his claim to not make value judgments was invalid.

LS: Yes.

Ms. Barnett: But the point of whether, in Weberian terms, something is true charisma, or not true charisma—one, you can't make such a statement, because the way Weber defines legitimacy is the way the people perceive it; and so there is no charisma separate from that.

LS: Ya, I know that. But the fact that Talcott Parsons mistranslated Weber—for which Weber of course is in no way responsible—indicates the problem.[47] I mean, Weber says, whether this charismatic leader is a charlatan, a swindler, or genuinely convinced is wholly indifferent, provided the followers don't notice it. But still I ask, must the social scientist not be critical regarding the opinions which followers have of their leader? In many cases, they may not have sufficient evidence to answer the question, but must they not at least raise the question of whether the authority believed in is actually of that kind in which it is believed? I gave [48][the] simple example [that] constitutional monarchy can be sham constitutional monarchy.[49] And the same: Can there not be a distinction between a genuine charismatic leader, what Hegel called a world-historical hero who identifies himself with a great cause, and a clever swindler?

Ms. Barnett: True. But to determine the difference, that doesn't mean to make a value judgment—

LS: Oh, yes, it makes a value—

Ms. Barnett: You[50] [don't] say one is good and the other is bad. You say he fits correctly into the category or he does not.

LS: No, not quite. Because [what] I stated before, perhaps in too general terms to be understood, is this: That these so-called immanent value judgments, for example, "good general" or "bad general"—that can be objectively found out, because one knows a bit about which kind of qualities a general must have and does have, and it is not an *absolute* value judgment, because why should there be generals—i.e., why is not war altogether bad, and therefore generals[51] as bad as thieves? Then you can also make a distinction between good and bad thieves. But the question arises: Is it possible to stop there, at this immanent judgment? Is there not a necessity, if you say of a man—now what was the example? A fake, and a genuinely dedicated, inspired man, you say "this is only for purely theoretical purposes," it goes beyond that, you cannot arbitrarily put a stop to that. And the fundamental reason—I tried to say it in this form, because we are dealing in all cases with human beings, whereas it is arbitrary or voluntary whether a man is a general, or a thief, a painter, or whatever it may be, it is not voluntary for any human being to be a human being. Yes?

Ms. Barnett: But to make an arbitrary stop—you can't—the man who attempts to make an arbitrary stop is doing that because he believes that the certainty of his knowledge ends at that point.

LS: Yes, all right—

Ms. Barnett: So then a conflict results in whether we can have absolute values.

LS: Surely, if he believes that, he must stop. But his belief may be erroneous.

Ms. Barnett: So that's the disagreement—

LS: That is the issue—

Ms. Barnett: The absolute values the scientist . . .

LS: The word "absolute values" has so many connotations, which are in my opinion wholly superfluous, and therefore I would not like to use it, but let us take it in this way. When I say, He is a first-rate general with these and these qualities, [I mean] a very outstanding man, the greatest general around, whatever it may be. We can find out about these things a bit in a commonsensical manner, or even if we know nothing about strategy, by a certain sensible belief in authority. [For example], knowing that

Montgomery is admitted to be a very good general (the British), we can find out who Montgomery regarded as top generals; this can help us a bit.[xvii] But I do not want to go into this question. The main point is that these limited, conditional judgments, like "If general, he's good," mean more, turn out to be more than these if-statements, because the qualities ascribed, at least some of them, are qualities which we call virtues, distinctions, excellences, of human beings.[xviii] And there we cannot simply say: If you like that, you may, but if you don't, don't. Because these excellences have this character: that if we realize them, if we are open to them, we cannot but respect or admire them.

There are many [questions]. All right. I should really have[52] someone, a kind of chairman.

Student: Well, I'm wondering whether this just applies in one direction. It seems to me that the argument so far would lead to the conclusion that the factual judgments that have been made by the social scientist in his effort to leave out values are things that must be taken into consideration and are judgments based on values. In other words, you can't ignore whether or not a particular man has the qualities that he is reputed to have in making a judgment about him. It's not only whether or not these qualities are good or bad if you're making an evaluation, but also whether or not he has them, so that the factual part is necessary for the judgments that we must make of human beings. Is the discussion meant to apply also in the other direction, that somehow the social scientist's task, to the limited extent that he's set it for himself, necessarily needs value judgments to become involved in it?

LS: I believe so. I mean,[53] there is a possibility of arbitrarily limiting oneself. There are some kinds of questions in which no value judgments arise. For example, in mere statistics, in most cases no value questions would arise. That is possible. But we are now concerned with the question whether you can define the scope of social science as a whole, of all the questions relevant for social science, in such a way that value judgments are strictly forbidden. That's the question. A man may, for example, abstain from making value judgments for reasons of modesty, sensible modesty, because the case is extremely complex and he doesn't dare to judge. But he would misunderstand himself if he didn't see that this restraint implies that he is on his way towards a value judgment and he knows he has not yet the sufficient equipment, factual or other, in order to pass a value judgment.

Same Student: In that case, then, there's no disagreement over the fact that the two realms may be different in their nature, and the kind of proof that is appropriate to them or to which they are susceptible may be different, but the point of argument is that the

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[xvii] Bernard Montgomery (1887–1976), general in the British Army during World War II.

[xviii] The main point is that these commonsense judgments mean more, are more, than those limited, conditional judgments such as "if general, he's good." Strauss's point turns on a distinction between those statements that involve a concept (e.g., *general*), that have criteria built into them, that may be analyzed in a value-neutral sort of way, and those in which some moral attribute or virtue is predicated of a subject as human being or what have you, those that cannot be so analyzed.

modern social scientist is going from the fact of difference into the fact of not being able to pay any attention to [it]. And would [54][it be correct to say] that *because* these questions must be raised, they must be the concern of the social scientist anyway, even though they're of a different nature from the ones—

LS: No, that is exactly what I deny. [55]In an arbitrary manner, it can be done, but if we are concerned with purposive things, we have not only to know the purpose but the things demand to be judged in terms of the purpose. And this requires that you take the purpose seriously and see even whether it is a sound or unsound purpose. It belongs to that, you cannot separate that. And the great question is whether a value-free social science does not, by its arbitrary limitation, necessarily lead to misinterpretation.

I once discussed the case, a[56] very famous case, of Max Weber's theory of the origin of the capitalist spirit.[xix] I'm speaking now from memory. It is roughly this. Weber's thesis can be stated as follows: Calvinism is a most important cause of the capitalist spirit. You have heard of that in college, I'm sure. Now when you read Weber more carefully and don't leave it at this general statement, you see what he in effect means is that a certain *corruption* of Calvinism led to the capitalist spirit. That is something very different from simply saying Calvinism. In Calvin's language, which Weber naturally would not use, it would mean: Owing to a carnal, [or fleshly], understanding of a spiritual teaching, [57]Calvinism led under certain conditions to the emergence of the capitalist spirit. Here you see that [by] the omission of the value judgment—the corruption of Calvinism, say, a lower form, a degraded form, of Calvinism—he arrived at a factually untrue judgment. As Tawney put it, the Calvinism which became capitalist was a Calvinism which had made its peace with the world, i.e., which had become entirely worldly, which is another way of saying [that] it was not the real stuff.[xx] Now these are not ultimate value judgments, because the question is here left open whether Calvinism is *the* true religion, or the true interpretation of Christianity, or whatever, but within these limits we must judge. And that happens to us all the time. In many cases we are unable to judge, no doubt. I mean, I, for example, would be wholly unable to judge of musical things—well, I naturally don't judge them. But in other cases, if you are a social scientist, you must judge.

Student: Is it not possible to say that Calvinist spiritual belief was corrupted without saying that this is a good thing or a bad thing? It's the same question, but we keep coming back to it.

LS: Yes, but don't you see that in doing that, you cannot go on to a more interesting or a broader question except after having made value judgments. That is the point. Just as you cannot go on in medicine before you have made the value judgment: This is a corruption of the liver. And then you ask how that corruption was introduced, by alcohol or whatever it may be. That is the point. Therefore, I hesitate to speak of absolute value judgments—these are questions which arise in a proper manner, so that one is properly

[xix] See *Natural Right and History*, 59 ff.
[xx] R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Harcourt, Brace, 1926). Tawney specifically criticizes Weber; see 315n32.

prepared for seeing them or understanding them only after a very long effort. Why not proceed in a truly empirical manner, in a way in which we know our bearings, and ascend, step by step, and not simply say from the beginning: Cut these kinds of things out because there are value judgments involved—because in this particular, limited way, you can be sure of your ground, [58]and if you are not, you shouldn't make them. Yes?

Student: Going back to the question of the distinction between common sense and science: Is the essence of what you have said in this respect that common sense and science both rest on the same epistemology?

LS: No. Common sense rests on *no* epistemology. Science, whether it knows it or not, rests on an epistemology. In most cases I believe scientists know that. There is this great change, a radical change in philosophy connected with the name of Descartes,[59] the great mathematician and physicist, which is at the bottom of modern science. Strictly speaking, there is no epistemology before modern times. But surely common sense doesn't have that. The posture of common sense is that which we all have in ordinary life: Are you sure that this was X who hit Y? Of course I am sure: I was there, I have seen it. Well, even in that case errors are possible, as we all know. But still, common sense also knows the ways in which these things can and must be checked. I mean, all judicial procedure is based on some commonsense awareness of how such statements of a witness, for example, have to be checked. That has nothing to do with epistemology.

Same Student: Yet isn't common sense based on empirically verifiable propositions? That is, a commonsense proposition is one that can be verified empirically.

LS: Yes, but what does this mean? For example, if you have the statement: This is a human being, to whom I can address my questionnaire, and this is not [a human being]. What does it mean, that this is empirically verifiable? The one will not say hello when I say hello? [Laughter] This is an empirical proof that the one is a human being, the other is not?

Same Student: What I'm saying is that, yes, it does raise questions of epistemology, and because science says that we accept only statements which can be verified empirically, it's resting on the same—

LS: Ya, to that extent. But you see the divergence of common sense and science comes out in such simple things. Common sense tells us that the sun is rising in the east and setting in the west, that the earth is standing and the sun is moving. Then Copernicus came, and there came infinitely greater complications later, especially in our century. Common sense has been proven wrong. What does common sense say about heaven which can stand up after the invention of the telescope? What about the enormous worlds opened up by the microscope, which are wholly inaccessible to common sense as common sense? It would be more helpful to say: Common sense is unarmed reason—I mean not armed with telescope and microscope—and science is armed reason. Now if you state it in this way, the question arises: Are there not spheres where unarmed reason is at least as good as armed? (You know what I mean by "armed"; that is not the best

way, but you understand me.) For example, in our relations with human beings,[60] in our understanding of them, in our handling of them, we are not helped in any way by telescope and microscope. If you don't believe me, read *Gulliver's Travels*, where,[61] when he was in Brobdingnag,[62] he looked in a way through a microscope and saw people of enormous size and other things of this kind. This, I believe, is in a more practical way the issue. And this also shows the limitations of this analogy: since the natural sciences have led us to a much deeper understanding of extra-human nature than we possessed formerly, the application of the same approach and of the same methods to human things must bring about a similar progress, a radical progress and improvement of our knowledge of human things and human of affairs.

Student: You said that social science must ascend to the beginning, and mathematics, we can start at the beginning, and you gave as an example of this Spinoza's sentence—

LS: "Man."

Same Student: —about "Man thinks" and that there was an undefined term, being "man." But[63] I always thought there were undefined terms at the beginning of mathematics also, so I don't see what the relevance of that is.

LS: Yes, but Spinoza defines all the terms at the beginning. I mean, must you not define a point, a line, a plane, a sphere, at the beginning?

Same Student: You're saying that "point" was defined? I thought that "point" was an undefined term.

LS: Well then, *stigmē*. Euclid begins, if I remember well, with the definition of "point." At any rate, here the key point is this: that *the* chief subject of the *Ethics*, or at least of three-fifths of the book, is man and human things, and it is not said what man is. Of course Spinoza tries to do it by simply saying [that] man has this peculiar quality of cogitation; and by making clear what cogitation is, then we understand from this way what man is. That's the way in which he does this.

Student: I think the distinction to which most of us are accustomed as a premise of at least contemporary social scientists is not simply the distinction between armed and unarmed common sense, but rather the distinction[64] between sense perceptions, [65] along with the aids which sense perception employs, such as microscopes and telescopes on the one hand, and on the other hand, what are said to be nonempirically verifiable statements, such as questions of moral and aesthetic goodness.

LS: That is the reason why I was a bit hesitant to leave it at the identification of science with common sense, because for common sense this distinction doesn't exist. I gave this example. "X is so-and-so many years in politics." Empirical statement. "X is corrupt." Empirical statement, yes? From the point of view of common sense, there is no question. How do they know he is corrupt? Because they have seen him acting corruptly: empirical. That this is excluded in a certain manner—of course the social scientist, I

suppose, would say [that] you can speak of X as corrupt, but strictly speaking you have to use "corrupt" in quotation marks in order to explain that this is a popular expression which, when it is used by a social scientist, does not have the simply condemning meaning which it has in ordinary political life.

Same Student: But if I understand your argument correctly, what you are saying is [that] although it is true that science concedes that certain parts of our common sense are true without question, i.e., sense perceptions, by the very act of splitting up common sense into sense perceptions and perceptions of moral and aesthetic qualities, science is denying the primacy of common sense, and only after having set up this arbitrary distinction is it then going to concede part of the sphere of common sense back to it, and by that act it's—

LS: Ya, but there are representatives of this view who would not go so far and would question that because—well, look at this very simple thing. Common sense speaks of *things*. When we speak commonsensically of sense perception, we do not mean mere sense data. If I say I see a cow, that is not merely the sense data. I mean, if I analyze exactly what is on my retina and so on and so on, and what I know by any other senses and put this together, that is not the same thing which I mean when I say I see the cow; and therefore there is a difficulty already here in sense perception. Sense perception, as ordinarily understood, means the perception of things and people. But from the scientific point of view the question is: What is really sensually perceived? Not merely sense data? And then the great question arises: How can we come from the sense data to the thing—I mean that peculiar pattern which is constructed in some way or other out of the sense data? This question then arises, and then we see that has something to do with language. And then language of course differs from culture to culture [and] from nation to nation. And then the question arises: Should there not be a truly objective language which is free from all the vagaries of the empirical languages? The extreme answer to that is of course to have mathematics as the true, universal, and objective language. Now this whole issue is involved in the question of common sense and science. Yes?

Student: Well, couldn't a more sophisticated social scientist just not stand so strongly on this point of being value-free but still try to buttress this original argument that's the basis of the distinction of what's sensually perceivable and what is . . . and ultimately make everything empirically verifiable by saying something like: When we say we are looking at a human being, or when we say we are in room 122, for example, we are obviously saying something more than just "I have an opinion that" or "I believe that." And when we say a man is corrupt, the question arises whether we are merely stating an opinion or, again, stating something more.

LS: Ya, sure—

Same Student: Now the more sophisticated scientist, not the person trying to uphold this value-free-ness, might say: Well, just as you would say that saying that so-and-so is a human ultimately depends upon a certain convention that grows up in any language, that that language depends ultimately on our having received certain perceptions, on being

able to organize perceptions, let's say, or on certain other contingencies; similarly, the fact that somebody's corrupt, the fact that somebody's good or bad, would also depend upon certain perceptions, causing them pleasure and pain and things like that. And again, the best way to find out whether so-and-so is corrupt, just as the best way to find out that so-and-so is human, is to hold surveys, for example, to see just what the concepts are in certain societies—

LS: No. All right, what the concepts are, [but] the judgments are a different thing. So the concept of corruption prevalent in a society may very well lead to the conclusion of a sufficiently discerning man that A is corrupt. But the general opinion about that A may be that he is uncorrupt, because they are not sufficiently discerning. That would be another difficulty. But apart from that, I think one would have to raise the question, one could not avoid [it]: Is the conception of corruption which is prevailing in a society a sound or an unsound one?[66] After all, we want not merely to find out what the society thinks and does, but also what kind of a society it is, and that has very much to do with how deep and thought-through and sensible its views on such matters as corruption are. I'm sorry, I must now stop. We will continue this discussion next time and, I hope, finish it.

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[1] Deleted "you figure out—or could."
[2] Deleted "if you ask a question."
[3] Deleted "and."
[4] Deleted "And I believe what he means by that."
[5] Deleted "what he means by that"
[6] Deleted "could not."
[7] Deleted "No, I think."
[8] Deleted "cannot."
[9] Deleted "he says."
[10] Deleted "that we take."
[11] Deleted "which."
[12] Moved "demand."
[13] Deleted "Now."
[14] Deleted "a."
[15] Deleted "that."
[16] Deleted "whether this."
[17] Deleted "well."
[18] Deleted "me"
[19] Deleted "that."
[20] Deleted "they."
[21] Deleted "and this is."
[22] Deleted "that."
[23] Deleted "with this question." Moved "question."
[24] Deleted "Perceptivity has."
[25] Deleted "Well, before I."
[26] Deleted "because."
[27] Deleted "that."
[28] Deleted "like adjusted, or."
[29] Deleted "we."
[30] Deleted "or, to say this"
[31] Deleted "know to."
[32] Deleted "do."
[33] Deleted "that"
[34] Deleted "of the various forms of knowing." Moved "the various forms of knowing."

[35] Deleted “One can state it as follows.”
[36] Deleted “I don’t think that.”
[37] Deleted “it.”
[38] Deleted “and in this sense.”
[39] Deleted “is.”
[40] Deleted “to.”
[41] Moved “make.”
[42] Deleted “as.”
[43] Deleted “if you.”
[44] Deleted “Because there are points.”
[45] Deleted “disinterested.”
[46] Deleted “You said that.”
[47] Deleted “What about the case.”
[48] Deleted “a”
[49] Deleted “Is this not—?”
[50] Deleted “didn’t.”
[51] Deleted “to be.”
[52] Moved “really.”
[53] Deleted “you can.”
[54] Deleted “the argument then be”
[55] Deleted “There are not questions which can—I mean”
[56] Deleted “more.”
[57] Deleted “carnal, you know, fleshly, understanding, of a spiritual teaching.”
[58] Deleted “I mean, you should at least”
[59] Deleted “which is—Descartes.”
[60] Deleted “telescopes and microscopes.”
[61] Deleted “you know.”
[62] Deleted “where.”
[63] Deleted “aren’t there also.”
[64] Deleted “between common sense.”
[65] Deleted “I should say.”
[66] Deleted “And I believe one.”

Session 5: January 20, 1965

Strauss's Repsonses to Contemporary Defenses of the Fact-Value Distinction

Leo Strauss: [In progress] . . . we take to be nothing, like air. And I meant by this, in the first place, the fact-value distinction as now accepted in social science. It is true, the fact-value distinction is made explicit and conscious, but what is not made explicit is that it constitutes a problem. And [in the second place], this enlargement of our horizon, or this greater clarity about the situation: that we should at least learn to consider the possibility that something taken for granted generally, at least, may not be true. There is an old-fashioned word for this kind of thing, the word "prejudice." There may be true prejudices, but as long as it is a prejudice, you cannot know whether it is true or not. To indicate this character of the view in question, I remind you of a few facts to which I have referred occasionally. Simmel,[i] who began this kind of thing, linked the fact-value distinction up with the fact that science is causal and not teleological, and hence it can deal only with facts and not with values. But science was causal from its very inception in the seventeenth century; it was opposed to the teleological science of Aristotle, and yet no one ever dreamt until the end of the nineteenth century that the causal science must issue in a value-free social science. Or, to take another example, some people take it for granted that the basis of the fact-value distinction is the distinction between Is and Ought. But the distinction between Is and Ought is much older; the distinction between Is and Ought does not imply that there is no possibility of knowledge of the Ought. So the specific condition is not only the distinction between Is and Ought but the alleged or real realization that there cannot be any knowledge of the Ought. The distinction between facts and values arose about seventy-five years ago and became quasi-all-powerful only after World War I. It has come into being, and therefore it may perish again, and not merely because of human inability to keep to that high level; it may also be due to an inherent defect of that doctrine. Fundamentally, I do not wish to convey more than this simple enlargement of horizon.

Now before I go on, I would like to say a few words about the question raised by Miss Barnett regarding Popper, Popper's distinction between verificationist and falsificationist theories of science. I will read that statement, I am grateful to you. Let me read to you a few statements, and what I have to say is very brief.

"Popper claims that there is no appeal to any standard of rationality that must be accepted a priori. Since justificationists [namely, the ordinary positivists—LS] have at least one infallible element in their arsenal of criticism, or in other words have the standard of rationality that is accepted a priori, they must succumb to the I.R.A. [which is the infinite regress argument—LS], and choose an arbitrary starting point. Popper claims he does not choose an arbitrary starting point, obviously."

Now how does he proceed?

[i] See the discussion of Simmel in session 3.

"Popper's answer to the 'How do you know?' question is: 'I don't know, I guess.' He may further add: 'I try to turn my guesses into criticizable ones, e.g., potentially falsifiable, so that they may be replaced by, not knowledge, but by improved guesses.' Thus the demarcation between science and nonscience for Popper is fallibilism based on the falsifiability criterion. [In other words, any statement which cannot be falsified by scientific methods simply falls without the province of science, but if it is falsifiable in principle, then it falls within the province of science.—LS] Of course, a skeptic can still ask: 'How do you know that you improve your guesses by falsifying your first guess?' But the answer is easy: 'I guess.'"

That's it. Now whether that is a satisfactory account of knowledge in general and of science in particular is a long question into which we do not have to go here. I would say of that only this: it is hard to abolish the distinction between knowing and guessing, without which we cannot possibly take our bearings. I guess Mr. X is in this room, then I go into this room and then I *see* he is in it: I do no longer guess, I *know*. A theory which excludes the distinction between knowing and guessing would seem to be radically imperfect. Now when making this remark I make one qualification: I have not looked at Popper proper, and you or your teachers may have misinterpreted him, that I cannot exclude. I can only speak about what I have seen.

But this is not our question. The whole issue is not relevant to what we are discussing. What we are concerned about is this: whatever Popper may say, he still means (and in this respect there is no difference between him and the other positivists, including Comte) that science is limited to a certain kind of question, while it cannot answer another kind of question. This remains unchanged. And he does not commit this question-begging folly to say [that] the questions which science cannot answer are meaningless questions. That would be extremely simple: then science would have the monopoly of all meaningful questions, and that would be fine. That he does not do. And this is, by the way, the issue between him and the more common brand of positivists. The questions traditionally answered by theology and metaphysics—the questions of Why, in Comte's formulation, and the questions of value—remain and are outside the domain of science. Science cannot even assert that science is good, because that would be a value judgment.

Now this fact, that questions of the utmost importance, the most important questions remain wholly outside of the realm of science, leads and has led to what has been called the flight from scientific reason toward theology or metaphysics. We shall see later that there is or there is thought to be an alternative towards which one can escape from scientific reason, or must escape, different than theology and metaphysics. But before I take up this question, I would like to complete my discussion[1] of this [question of the] fact-value distinction.[2]

I will proceed in the following manner. I will discuss briefly some criticisms of the argument which I have advanced in the[3] last [few] lectures. The most detailed and serious criticism, I found in a book by Arnold Brecht, *Political Theory: The Foundations of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*, Princeton, 1959. This is a very solid and

respectable book. It does not keep its promise to deal with the foundations of twentieth-century political thought—you would think of things like liberal democracy, and communism, and fascism, and other things of the same nature—it is a strictly methodological book. So what he means by "political thought" is the thought you find in political science departments, not in the political arena. But this error is easily corrected: if you look at the table of contents, you see immediately that this is a strictly academic and not a political book, a book dealing with political matters as such.

Now[4] I will read a few points. He calls the position which I describe "Scientific Value Relativism," putting the three words in capitals, in order to make quite clear that this is an entity by itself, and he says the following thing.

"Most revolters against Scientific Value Relativism [the usage is interesting: Scientific Value Relativism is the established thing, and therefore those who disagree with that are revolters—LS] describe it incorrectly. They do so in good faith, of course, but for that reason the more passionately. The commonest misrepresentation is to arouse the impression that 'scientific' relativists are 'philosophical' relativists who teach that there *is* nothing of absolute value and that all values *are* equal—a dogma that could be upheld scientifically only by someone who was not alone personally disinclined to believe in God but was positively convinced that there was none, and more than that, who thought that the nonreality of God could be scientifically demonstrated. [ii]

". . . Strauss says that Weber 'assumed as a matter of course that there is no hierarchy of values: all values are of the same rank,' and Voegelin, that Weber 'treated all values as equal.' Now, Weber taught nothing of the kind, and he could not have done so, because in the first place he was not of the opinion that the absence of a hierarchy of values, and that includes the nonreality of God, could be scientifically ascertained; and in the second, the very point of his work was that values are unequal according to their different origins, implications, and consequences, and also because of their different ideal meaning.[iii] [In other words, the value "freedom" has a very different meaning from the value "piety"; hence they are unequal.—LS] He did not treat values as 'equal,' but merely their validity as 'equally undemonstrable' beyond the demonstrable consequences [i.e., if you choose value A, you are bound to choose something else—LS]. He did not even treat all values this way but only 'ultimate' values; for he recognized of course that each value can be judged scientifically as to its consistency with, and its usefulness for the attainment of, some allegedly ulterior value."[iv]

Now I can only say this. The key point which Brecht makes is that it is wrong to say that positivists regard values as equal: they regard them only as equally undemonstrable. This distinction would make sense only if social science had any other criteria than demonstrability and indemonstrability. For instance, all revealed religions regard

[ii] Arnold Brecht, *Political Theory: The Foundations of Twentieth-Century Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 262.
[iii] Brecht, *Political Theory*, 263.
[iv] Brecht, *Political Theory*, 263–64.

each other as equally indemonstrable, but not therefore as equal, because they possess relevant criteria other than demonstrability and indemonstrability for preferring one's own position to that of the other religions. There is no other possibility; [i.e., for social science positivism], there is no criterion whatever for regarding one value as preferable to another or as higher than another. The moment you say that the value, [say], guiding a biblical prophet or guiding Socrates is higher than that of any member of the Cosa Nostra, then you have committed a value judgment. I think Brecht only tries to evade the issue by not facing that. On the contrary, I think that the belief in the equality of all values is, as I stated on a former occasion,[5] the hidden reason why so many of the social-science positivists are democrats of a certain kind: if all values are equal, then each value, or each man's value, should have the same right to be considered in the formation of government policy as that of somebody else.

"Strauss, likewise, sees inconsistency in the fact that relativists cannot help using value judgments themselves. If they were consistent, he says,[v] relativists in describing concentration camps would not be permitted to speak of 'cruelty' because this includes a value judgment; they could merely describe the acts actually committed, in a factual manner."[vi]

LS: Factual manner: in other words, you describe the various acts of torture in the way in which you would describe some chemical reaction or something.

"Nor would historians be permitted to speak of 'morality,' 'religion,' 'art,' or 'civilization,' when interpreting the thoughts of peoples or tribes that are unaware of such notions or use them differently, or of 'prostitutes,' or of 'epigones.'[vii] Wittily[viii] he enumerates many value-impregnated expressions Weber used in his own historical papers, such as 'grand figures,' 'laxity,' 'absolutely unartistic,' 'ingenious,' 'crude and abstruse notions,' and 'impressive achievement.'

"These illustrations only go to show that Weber's own interpretation of his methodology was very different from Strauss'. No scientific relativist would condemn words like cruelty, civilization, prostitution, or, for that matter, crime or slums, wherever they are used within a clear frame of reference as descriptive in accordance with known standards—"

Now he underlines: "*as long as these standards are not themselves at issue*"—i.e., if everyone concerned takes it for granted that crime must be fought, then we use the word "crime" and there is no difficulty. "Whenever the latter is the case"—whenever the standards are at issue—

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[v] The word in Brecht is "writes."
[vi] Brecht completes his point: "(which by the way might be much more graphic than speaking of cruelty, A.B.)."
[vii] Brecht writes "or epigones."
[viii] Noted in the margin of the transcript source: "Strauss is reading this with suppressed glee."

"then indeed, according to Scientific Value Relativism, is it scientifically not correct to continue using one's own standards as though their absolute validity had been proven. Then the scientist must first analyze meaning and implication of the different standards within the possibility of science[ix]—possibilities that, as we have seen, are by no means so limited as to exclude scientific contributions."[x]

LS: It means that science is capable of showing that certain values are not realizable in the circumstances, etc. I would reply to this as follows. On the very basis of relativism, the standards are necessarily at issue. Whether they are at issue between two particular social scientists who happen to agree as to the badness of slums or corruption is wholly uninteresting; that is merely a subjective fact. From the point of view of social science, the standards are necessarily at issue, since all value judgments are rationally questioned. So the strict social scientist ought to use value-impregnated expressions, such as "corruption," "cruelty," only in quotation marks, meaning what the vulgar call cruelty, but which we would have to call X, Y, Z, if at all. Those expressions imply that the things in question are bad. When you speak of prostitution, you mean something bad, and then you have to coin a new word. We are calling it, say, free love of a certain kind: free love which, however, is perfectly compatible[6] with remuneration, let me put it this way.[7] [Laughter] Yes, well, that would be still better; then no one could blame you.

I heard once the following argument in favor of corruption in New York City on that basis, namely, that the conventional judgment of these people is so unfair because these corrupt politicians gave great help to poor immigrants. The only way in which these poor fellows could get some hearing for their rightful claims was to find corrupt politicians. Now what is this? That is of course not a refutation of the ordinary view of corruption; it is an argument showing that what is regarded prima facie as simply bad is in fact, in the circumstances, a lesser evil. These are all value judgments. No one, if he speaks of any of these things, will say that these things condemned as such are under all circumstances bad. No one can defend corruption as such, namely, the misuse of public power for one's private purposes. In other words, it is impossible to say that corruption is a subjective value judgment. I will come back to a similar issue later. Let me say a few more remarks, [because] in an appendix he comes back to this question. In the first section, when he discussed my criticism, he spoke of "misrepresentations" in the heading, making it clear that [it] is not deliberate. Now he calls it "misunderstandings."

"Strauss resumed his objections in another paper.[xi] The relativists hold, he asserts, that 'civilization is not intrinsically superior to cannibalism'; hence, speech for the cause of civilization will be to the relativist 'not rational discourse, but mere "propaganda," a propaganda confronted by the equally legitimate and perhaps more effective "propaganda" in favor of cannibalism.' Relativists teach, he further contends, that 'the

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[ix] Brecht has "implications" and "possibilities."

[x] Brecht, *Political Theory*, 264-65.

[xi] Brecht has "Leo Strauss resumes his objections in his paper 'Social Science and Humanism' (in L. White, ed., *The State of the Social Sciences*, Chicago 1956, pp. 415 ff.)." This essay is reprinted as chapter 1 of Leo Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

absolute truth of value systems, such as Plato's, has been refuted unqualifiedly, with finality, absolutely,' and he contrasts the 'apparent humility' of relativists with their 'hidden arrogance,' considering all people 'provincial and narrow' except themselves. [xii] [What I meant was that they regard all these people like Plato and so on as provincial and narrow because they were the slaves of value systems accepted by their society, whereas they are completely free from such biases.—LS]

"This squarely put challenge [Brecht continues—LS] is particularly helpful if it is neither ignored nor ridiculed [which he thinks would be the natural reaction of any sensible man—LS] [laughter] but met in equally forthright language. And it can be met. For each of Strauss' statements is in conflict with the facts, insofar as Scientific Value Relativism is concerned. First of all, where and when has a scientific relativist ever asserted as a fact that civilization *is not* superior to cannibalism? Such apodictic negative statements would be quite contrary to the principles of Scientific Method."

I can only say, if the scientific relativists [LS chuckles] did not assert it, then they simply keep silent about what they mean. But I do not even have to go so far. Look at the use of the terms "culture" and "civilization" in present-day anthropology[8]: there are cultures which are cannibalistic, and are they treated as in any way inferior by the social scientist to noncannibalistic cultures? Of course not. Now let me go on.

"The only question that could be raised by some pedantic relativist or for the matter of methodological argument is, What is the scientific *evidence* for the superiority of non-cannibalistic civilization? [Now I would say this: In a matter of such importance, one cannot be pedantic enough.—LS] How about civilizations that abhor the eating of cattle or hogs?"

Well, to which I would say: Here Brecht seems to say that the question of the eating of cattle and hogs has the same status as the question of the eating of human beings, which I think is a grave thing. [Laughter]

"But here too Dr. Strauss would have no valid point. Scientific Value Relativism, although not satisfied with easy references to intuition [that's a dig—LS] [great laughter], is at no loss to show the superiority of noncannibalism, once 'superiority' is defined, as it generally is, in terms other than selfish satisfaction of personal or tribal passions and with references to humanity.[xiii] Even if the term 'superior,' in the proposition 'Noncannibalism is superior to cannibalism,'[xiv] were used in a strictly selfish sense (which Strauss certainly would not do) Scientific Method would not be at the end of its resources; the long-run superiority of one pattern of behavior over another can often be demonstrated even when the question is solely that of personal satisfaction."[xv]

[xii] Brecht's references to numbers of pages of Strauss's paper as printed in White have been omitted.

[xiii] Strauss omits a reference to a book chapter by Paul Edwards here.

[xiv] The words "in the proposition 'Noncannibalism is superior to cannibalism'" are a restatement, not in Brecht.

[xv] Brecht, *Political Theory*, 549n50.

Well, take the case of drugs, where every doctor can prove to you that you have momentary satisfaction from the drugs, but in the long run, damage. But listen to the main point. He regards it at least as possible that social science is able to prove the superiority of noncannibalism (a) on nonselfish, (b) on selfish, grounds, i.e., on the basis of all possible grounds, because that seems to be a complete disjunction, selfish and nonselfish. That would mean, in plain English, that social science can prove the superiority of noncannibalism to cannibalism, i.e., social science can establish at least one value judgment. The whole position would be destroyed if this were true. Let me see. There is I think one more point here.[9]

"On the other hand, Scientific Value Relativism may indeed be too humble to offer a *scientific* decision on a question like this: whether the captain of a marooned crew ought to be condemned if he permitted his men to eat the flesh of other men killed in battle or by accident, when this was the only alternative to starving."[xvi]

I think also a very interesting case. Why did he choose this example of the starving men in this particular situation, in preference to an example of men eating human flesh while they have other food in abundance? I understand it perfectly: because the latter would be a much graver case than the former. These people have at least the excuse[10] that this was the only way in which they could possibly survive, and there might even be a deeper one, because it is assumed they are on public duty. It all depends that they remain there to watch the enemy, and therefore they have to survive for their country, and therefore this may be defended. In other words, social science can legitimate the condemnation of what we may call frivolous cannibalism, a cannibalism not demanded practically by the situation.

Now I turn to another discussion which in a way leads further [or] leads to a deeper stratum, and that is in the book by Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, 1961, page 491, following. After having quoted a passage from my study on *Natural Right and History*, he continues.[xvii]

"We shall not attempt a detailed assessment of this complex argument, for a discussion of the numerous issues it raises would take us far afield. However, three claims made in the course of the argument will be admitted without further comment as indisputably correct: that a large number of characterizations sometimes assumed to be purely factual descriptions of social phenomena do indeed formulate a type of value judgment; that it is often difficult, and in any case usually inconvenient in practice, to distinguish between the purely factual and the 'evaluative' contents of many terms employed in the social sciences; and that values are commonly attached to means and not only to ends. However, these admissions do not entail the conclusion that, in a manner unique to the study of purposive human behavior, fact and value are fused beyond the possibility of distinguishing between them. On the contrary, as we shall try to show, the claim that

[xvi] Brecht, *Political Theory*, 550n.
[xvii] Nagel quotes from Strauss's "The Social Science of Max Weber," *Measure* 2 (1951): 211–14, which is identical to *Natural Right and History*, 50–53.

there is such a fusion of fact and value[xviii] and that a value-free social science is therefore inherently absurd, confounds two quite different senses of the term 'value judgment': the sense in which a value judgment expresses *approval or disapproval* either of some moral (or social) ideal, or of some action (or institution) because of a commitment to such an ideal; and the sense in which a value judgment expresses *an estimate* of the degree to which some commonly recognized (and more or less clearly defined) type of action, object, or institution is embodied in a given instance."[xix]

Now Nagel calls, in the sequel, the latter kind of value judgments, which he admits are indispensable, *characterizing* value judgments, and distinguishes them from *appraising* value judgments.

Student: Could you give the definition again, please?

LS: The appraising value judgments[11] say "this is intrinsically wrong"—the distinction is not very clear, as you will see—and the other, the characterizing, doesn't speak of intrinsic goodness. This is my formulation, by the way, not his. You say "prostitution"[12]—you characterize it [as prostitution]. Now he gives the following example: a given animal has anemia. Factual, and at the same time evaluative, to the extent that anemia is understood to be a defect. But according to Nagel, this characterizing value judgment does not mean that anemia is an undesirable condition; this would be an appraising value judgment. But the question I raise is this: Does he not admit that anemia is a defect? And this is, I think, the crucial point.

Now let me take another example. Nagel cannot deny that it is possible sometimes to make the characterizing value judgment "X is a crook." It is quite clear that "crook" is not very well defined, but in some cases the situation is so clear that everyone would admit that it's . . . Now he would then say this does not necessarily mean that X is undesirable—that would be an appraising one. And I can easily see that it doesn't follow;[13] it may be highly desirable, for example, as a stool pigeon. But in giving this illustration, I show already the intelligible context within which we make value judgments, and within which we qualify them. But if I say "X is a crook," it surely means that he is despicable. Now whether this is a good reason for you never to speak to him, never to meet him, that is a practical question, in the normal sense. That is left open, naturally. I mean, if you are Orlando Wilson, it may be your duty to talk to him. And there may be other reasons: he may be a very near relative and you cannot avoid him without harming your nearest and dearest, and so on. But this is possibly the meaning of the distinction between characterizing and appraising. The key point, it seems to me, he admits: that characterizing value judgments, as he calls them, are inevitable. Now let me see how he continues that.

"It would be absurd to deny that in characterizing various actions as mercenary, cruel, or deceitful, sociologists are frequently (although perhaps not always wittingly) [what a

[xviii] The words "of fact and value" are a restatement, not in Nagel.
[xix] Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), 491–92.

satire—LS] asserting appraising as well as characterizing value judgments. [In other words, they say not only "he has a defect, a human defect," but also "it is undesirable that there is this kind of thing"—LS.]

"Terms like 'mercenary,' 'cruel,' or 'deceitful' as commonly used have a widely recognized pejorative overtone. Accordingly, anyone who employs such terms to characterize human behavior can normally be assumed to be stating his disapprobation of that behavior (or his approbation, should he use terms like 'nonmercenary,' 'kindly,' 'truthful'), and not simply characterizing it."

Now here the question of course is this: The social scientists who use these terms, do they merely give in to a temptation—you know, we are brought up in this way, that we think in these terms—or is there a necessity for that?

"However, although many (but certainly not all) ostensibly characterizing statements asserted by social scientists undoubtedly express commitments to various (not always compatible) values, a number of 'purely descriptive' terms as used by natural scientists in certain contexts sometimes also have an unmistakably appraising value connotation [not merely characterizing—LS]. Thus, the claim that a social scientist is making appraising value judgments when he characterizes respondents to questionnaires as uninformed, deceitful, or irrational [this was an entirely fictitious example which I used, because I have never heard that pollsters ever do that[14]—LS] can be matched by the equally sound claim that a physicist is also making such judgments when he describes a particular chronometer as inaccurate, a pump as inefficient, or a supporting platform as unstable. Like the social scientist in this example, the physicist is characterizing certain objects in his field of research; but, also like the social scientist, he is in addition expressing his disapproval of the characteristics he is ascribing to those subjects."[xx]

LS: Now it is clear that in the case of artifacts like chronometers and so on, it is impossible not to judge whether they work or don't and to make this characterizing value judgment which in most circumstances becomes an appraising value judgment. But again, we must make a minor qualification: this may not be the last word. Think, for example, of a broken chair: it might be preferred to a chair in perfect working order, if that broken chair happens to be an heirloom, or perhaps some other quality, [15]it goes without saying. But a broken chair is still a defective chair, although in a given situation a broken chair may be preferable to a chair which is intact.

Well, these are the points which I wanted to bring up, and I must say I was grateful to Dr. Nagel for admitting at least this much, which would have been admitted by everyone thirty or forty years ago but today creates a difficulty.

Now I think it is best if I take this up right away, although I thought first of taking it up in a different context.[16] Nagel's position as a whole is a positivist position as it is familiar from many, many contemporary books. I would like to discuss with you one question here. The fundamental question for all physical sciences, and of course also for social

[xx] Nagel, *Structure of Science*, 494. Nagel has "objects" rather than "subjects."

science, is the question of causality. After all, explanation, correlations, one set of events, functions of another set of events, etc.—we used to call this, in the old-fashioned form, causality. Now what is causality? He quotes an author, and he seems to agree with that: "'Whenever you come across an *incomplete or disturbed system*, try to the best of your ability to *amplify it to one undisturbed whole*, looking for the *supplement* first among things known, near and far. If the desired supplement is not found among them, search for it among *things unknown*.'"[xxi]

This is a kind of operative definition of causality. Now what is the fundamental question here? "What is the upshot of the discussion[xxii] of the logical status of the principle of causality? Is the principle an empirical generalization"—obviously not—"an a priori truth"—excluded by positivism as such—"a concealed definition"—which would be merely tautological—"a convention that may be accepted or not as one pleases?"[xxiii] The principle is a maxim, a maxim of research.

"But if the principle is a maxim, is it a rule that may be followed or ignored at all?[xxiv] Is it merely an arbitrary matter what general goals are pursued by theoretical science in its development? It is undoubtedly only a contingent historical fact that the enterprise known as 'science' does aim at achieving the type of explanations prescribed by the principle of causality; [xxv] for it is logically possible that in their efforts at mastering their environments men might have aimed at something quite different. Accordingly, the goals men adopt in the pursuit of knowledge are *logically* arbitrary.

"And that applies to the principle of causality itself. Nevertheless, the actual pursuit of theoretical science in modern times is directed toward certain goals, one of which is formulated by the principle of causality. Indeed, the phrase 'theoretical science' appears to be so generally used that an enterprise not controlled by those objectives would presumably not be subsumed under this label. It is at least plausible, therefore, to claim that the acceptance of the principle of causality as a maxim of inquiry is an *analytical consequence* of what is commonly meant by 'theoretical science'[xxvi] [whether theoretical science is a pursuit which acts on this maxim—LS]. In any event, one can readily grant that, when the principle assumes this special form,[xxvii] so that it prescribes the adoption of a particular type of state-description by every theory, the principle might be abandoned in various areas of investigation. But it is difficult to understand how it would be possible for modern theoretical science to surrender the general ideal expressed by the principle without becoming therefore[xxviii] transformed into something incomparably different from

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[xxi] Nagel, *Structure of Science*, 320. The author quoted is Ludwik Silberstein.
[xxii] Nagel writes not "the discussion" but "this discussion."
[xxiii] Nagel, *Structure of Science*, 323.
[xxiv] Nagel has "at will."
[xxv] Strauss adds the words "of causality" as a clarification.
[xxvi] Nagel has "It is at least plausible to claim, therefore, that the acceptance of the principle of causality as a maxim of inquiry (whether the acceptance is explicit or only illustrated in the overt actions of scientists, and whether the principle is formulated with some precision or only vaguely) is an *analytical consequence* of what is commonly meant by 'theoretical science.'"
[xxvii] Nagel writes "a special form."
[xxviii] Nagel has "thereby."

what that enterprise actually is [i.e., it would cease to be theoretical science, in the hitherto meaning of the term—LS]."[xxix]

This key principle is logically arbitrary. Other principles could have been chosen. It is historically contingent. That was chosen, say, in the seventeenth century; something else could have been chosen, other principles were chosen in other ages. Men have chosen—*chosen*—this particular kind of intellectual orientation; they might have chosen others. And this choice is not susceptible of any legitimation, because if you say, "But this is the only way in which we could have made this tremendous progress in medicine, etc., etc.," then the answer is of course open: "Well, what about the thermonuclear bomb, and other things which are also consequences of that?"

More generally stated, if modern science supplies very great benefits to the human race, as no one denies, it also endangers the human race. On this basis, the question cannot be settled. There is no possibility of saying that the abandonment of this kind of science would be a relapse into barbarism, as everyone would have said in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Logic deals with this particular kind of science. But this is only a particular kind of science, there are *n* others. Therefore logic would have to be integrated into a larger whole which deals with all these fundamentally different forms in which men can take their bearings, and what is that most comprehensive study which deals with all possible forms of orientation? There is an ordinary name for that.

Student: "Philosophy"?

LS: No, [that's] misleading; it's too general. Intellectual history. Intellectual history would be that broader consideration of which logic, as the study of present-day scientific thought, would find a part.

Now in more general terms, positivism, the view that science, modern science, is the only genuine form of knowledge, leads eventually into historicism, and that is the subject to which I will turn now. And historicism is to that extent the deeper position, the philosophically more serious position, because it is aware, it takes seriously, the implications which positivism does not. Positivism, one could say, still carries on the old notion of science going back to Plato and other people, that science is the actualization of a high perfection of man as a rational animal, knowledge of *the* truth. And yet it can no longer maintain this Platonic assertion, as we saw from the quotations from Popper, for instance, when he[17] [says] it is only a kind of guessing, of a relatively controllable form of guessing as distinguished from uncontrollable guessing, and no longer any reference to knowledge and truth.

In a different way, in Nagel the fundamental and characteristic principle of modern science is a certain understanding of causality which is logically arbitrary. And the justification which would have been given for it, and is perhaps still given to it today by some more or less backward people—the enormous progress of natural science made possible by this interpretation of causality becomes doubtful when progress itself

[xxix] Nagel, *Structure of Science*, 324.

becomes doubtful. And it must become doubtful if value judgments cease to have intrinsic validity. Mr. Glenn?

Mr. Glenn: I can understand how there could be different kinds of science. But Nagel doesn't say that, I don't believe. He says, I think, that in their efforts at mastering their environments men could have chosen other methods, other kinds of science. I don't see how that could be.

LS: He says it is logically arbitrary. That means there are logically alternatives, which were not chosen. But furthermore, it is historically contingent. That refers us back to the decisive moment in the seventeenth century when this kind of science emerged. But there were some kinds of science before: there was Greek science, there was Babylonian science, there was perhaps even a kind of sorcery, and alchemy, and all this kind of thing based on an entirely different notion, which don't work in the way in which modern science works, but perhaps they work in another way as a form of satisfaction of human needs. That would need a long study.

Mr. Glenn: Yes, but from the little that I know of Greek science, for example, I don't believe that we would characterize Greek science as trying to control the environment, but rather as trying to understand it—

LS: Yes, but[18] then it would be very simple. Modern science differs from all other science by the fact that it tries to control the environment. Then there would be nothing quite so arbitrary about it. But he does not [directly] link up[19] causality with control of the environment, I suppose one reason being[20] [that] he doesn't believe that is the primary function of modern science, to control the environment.

Student: A point of information: would most present-day writers on scientific method and so on agree with Nagel that the principle of causality is logically arbitrary?

LS: Well, usually[21] they are not as honest, or don't go so far in the discussion as Nagel does. Reichenbach, for example, [22]he is one of the more common sort of positivist.[xxx] I read his discussion of causality some years ago. This did not even go so far. Simply: it works, and we assume it will work in the future. That's all. He[xxxi] faces this difficulty.

Now I could also state what I was trying to convey by this quotation as follows. I referred last time to the ultimate dependence of science on common sense. But this might be sufficient as an argument against positivism, but it is of no help to political philosophy, with which we are here concerned, for the following reason. For political philosophy, according to its primary meaning, is the quest for *the* just or *the* good political order, but common sense is historically variable. And so political philosophy remains exposed to this much more serious difficulty: that it is built on historically changeable ground and therefore can never be able to answer the question of *the* just or *the* good political order.

[xxx] Hans Reichenbach (1891–1953), German-born philosopher of science of the logical-positivist variety.
[xxxi] Sc. Nagel.

One can state this also as follows. In order to be true, a proposition must be meaningful. "Abracadabra is mabracadabra" cannot possibly be true because it is not a meaningful proposition. But what is and what is not meaningful depends on the specific historical situation: time, culture, nation, class. Hence, owing to this dependence of truth on meaningfulness, there cannot be universally valid truth. If science depends on common sense, and common sense is essentially historical, scientific truth cannot be universally valid—which is tacitly admitted by Nagel, insofar as all scientific truths are based on the use of the principles of causality as logically arbitrary and historically contingent principles. To this one can easily object and say: Look at the factual universality of mathematics and natural science in the modern world. This mathematics and science may be of Western origin, but they are obviously accessible to all men who are sufficiently gifted, wherever they are. This does not go to the root of the matter, but I limit myself only to one point. Do we have the same universality in the humanities and in the more interesting parts of the social sciences? There is no necessary conclusion from the natural sciences to the sciences of man, for the very simple reason that there may be an essential difference between the human and the subhuman. And natural science, this immensely successful enterprise, deals with the subhuman, and perhaps something radically different appears when we come up to man.

Now I would like now to—I mean, after having repeated this statement that positivism, for reasons I have not sufficiently explained but which have to do with the fact that the original understanding of science has been abandoned, namely, that science is the perfection of human nature—and this was so to say the rock on which science was built. [Now] when this was abandoned, in connection with the abandonment of the view that there are such things as perfections of natures, then eventually made it questionable: What is the basis of science?[xxxii] Why is science good? Some answers were given in modern times by people who rejected the teleological conception of nature, for example, Bacon and Hobbes: science is for the sake of power, for the sake of human well-being[23]. This has great difficulties even prior to the emergence of modern weapons because scientists frequently did not recognize what they were doing in this definition. I mean, mathematicians passionately concerned with these amazing riddles of the theory of numbers, for example, or concerned with the fantastic order or disorder of prime numbers—there is no essential relation of what they are doing to the benefit of the human race. "Science for the sake of science" is a view sill present in many mathematicians and also physicists, but of course the mathematicians and physicists may go on, they are not professionally obliged, as it were, to give an account of why they do what they do beyond the fact that it is generally regarded as a respectable thing. But the fundamental question of science—"Why science?"—has become questionable. And this questioning leads under modern conditions to historicism. I will now try to explain that.

[xxxii] Suggested reformulation: In sum, positivism, for reasons I have not sufficiently explained, involves the abandonment of the original understanding of science, namely, that science is the perfection of human nature; this was so to say the rock on which science was built. And this occurred in connection with the abandonment of the view that there are such things as perfections of nature. This eventually led to the question being raised: What is the basis of science? [Ed.]

Now let me first use a definition because, as is always the case, [24]positivism and historicism shade into each other and the pure cases of positivism and historicism are extremely rare. Only this much: that they both at present rule the Western world in the way in which Marxism rules the communist world—only, because of the fundamental divergence between the two, there is of course considerable freedom of argument which cannot exist if you have a single monolithic doctrine monolithically interpreted by the government.

Now positivism, we may say, asserts that all values are subjective, while scientific truth is objective. Historicism says, in the clear case, [that] the distinction between facts and values is not tenable. The categories of theoretical understanding are inseparable from the principles of evaluation. At any rate, not only values but science too is in a radical sense subjective. All human thought and action rests ultimately on premises which differ from age to age or from culture to culture, none of which can be said to be superior to any other. If this is so—and I remind you of what I said in connection with Nagel's argument regarding causality—the consequence is that you have to turn from—I mean, for the fundamental considerations, from scientific considerations, including those of political or social science, to those of [fundamental] history. History deals with the fundamental questions—of course, intellectual history.

Now in order to understand the problem of historicism, one must first get this clear in one's mind, that this is a very novel phenomenon.[25] In the ordinary presentation, you find some remarks about Plato's philosophy of history. *Ça n'existe pas*: that doesn't exist. You couldn't translate this into Greek, except into modern Greek. There are some people who say that the Greeks did not have that, but the origin is to be found in the Bible, in the Old Testament. But the trouble is that there is no Old Testament word for history. There is none. The Hebrew word for history is *historia*, of which you see that it is the Greek or the Latin word which has been taken over in modern times. It doesn't exist. Let us consider briefly the status of what we call history in classical times. The word "history," *historia*, exists in the wide meaning, first, of inquiry. Therefore, natural history in the old sense of the term, which the oldest ones among you may have come across in your childhood, that natural history was the description of animals: you know, lions, and tigers, and also animals nearer home. That was called natural history—[and also] the description of plants, etc. History means inquiry and of course also the results of inquiry. But apparently it took early [on] this peculiar meaning: inquiry with *other human beings*. Now it is obvious [that] if you inquire about a hedgehog, you don't[26] necessarily [need] other human beings, you look for yourself. But there are other things where you cannot find out what was except by inquiring with other human beings, living or dead. Dead: you look at their papers, and eyewitnesses you would like to have. Then it came to mean the inquiry into the deeds and sufferings of political societies and their members, and also the presentation of the results of such inquiries. So Herodotus's book could be called a history, it being an account of the results of what he has found out.

In modern times, to make this clear from the beginning, when people speak of the philosophy of history, they very frequently mean in contradistinction, say, to philosophy of nature. There is a dimension of reality called nature, while philosophy deals with *kinds*

of beings and therefore never[27] [thinks] with proper names. Aristotle says therefore that poetry is more philosophic than history because a poet, say, when he presents to us Achilles, lets us see in Achilles *Man*. The historian is not supposed to do this. He is supposed to tell us [about] Achilles: *this* individual, with these particular deeds and sufferings. Poetry is therefore more philosophic. That is Aristotle's statement.[xxxiii]

There is a most striking example of this [which] you find in Thomas Aquinas's *Summa*, the first question, the second article, where he discusses the question whether theology, what he calls sacred doctrine, is a science.[xxxiv] The objection is [that] science doesn't deal with individuals, *singularia*. But theology does deal with individuals, for example, with the deeds of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: beings indicated by proper names. Hence theology is not a science. Thomas replies as follows: The individuals are not the principal subject in theology but [are] only used as models of lives; we do that also in moral science, as Aristotle also would in the *Ethics* occasionally give some examples of men.[28] [In considering the question of] justice [or of] magnanimity, he might use occasionally an example of a well-known magnanimous or just man to illustrate, but the theme is the universal.

Political philosophy, when it emerged, dealt with justice, with the just order which is possible, and it did not hesitate to use history as a storehouse of examples, naturally. But it was in no way a historical discipline. The just order was called or could be called what is by nature right, and this notion of what is by nature right developed later in the notion of the natural law, which was conceived of as binding all men as men. As such, it must be duly promulgated: everyone must be able to know it; otherwise he cannot obey it. Now[29] whether the natural law is or is not always duly promulgated depends on how man was at the beginning. That is the crucial test case. If man at the beginning was Adam and Eve, created perfect, there was no difficulty in seeing why they should[30] know the natural law. But if man at the beginning was imperfect—the examples used in the seventeenth century would be the North American Indians or so—there is no reason to suppose that they would have been capable [of] understanding such a law. And[31] this was a view accepted by the "progressive thinkers," in quotation marks, of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the men who formed the modern tradition. Man has an imperfect beginning, a beginning in which he cannot know the natural law, in which he cannot know what is by nature right. There is a development of man from a state in which he was incapable of understanding the natural law towards a state in which he is now. The whole work of Vico, for example, is based on this point.[xxxv] Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* is also a very important document, called by him a history of man, *the* history of man, meaning not little anecdotes, more or less exciting, but the fundamental fact of man is that man is essentially a developing being, or, as Rousseau called it, perfectibility is of his essence. Here *the* true political teaching of Rousseau regarding the just society has become available only now, 1756 or thereabouts. *It could not have been known earlier*.

[xxxiii] *Poetics* 1451b5–11.
[xxxiv] *Summa Theologica*, 1a, q1 a2.
[xxxv] Giambattista Vico (1688–1744), philosopher of history.

Now this thought, which is so elementary for us, we can say was wholly absent from the earlier tradition. Rousseau implies that his political philosophy differs more or less from the teaching of all his predecessors. Excuse me if I emphasize these trivial things, but a very great problem is implied in that. In fact, every great political philosopher did this—that is, he said: Here I present the political truth. And that has nothing to do with modesty or immodesty, but he implies it is of course different from that of others. Why [else] should he write a new book? Take Locke, a man who was rather self-effacing compared with other political philosophers, and as such he refers and defers to authorities: "the judicious Hooker," Richard Hooker. But on one occasion at least he says, after having quoted Hooker, "But I moreover affirm,"[xxxvi] i.e., Hooker was right 99 percent, but not 100 percent; otherwise there would have been no reason for Locke to write his *Treatise*.

So in other words, the simple, elementary thing: that many great political philosophers teach very different things about the just order. One can say we have no political philosophy, but only political philosoph*ies*. There is not one edifice impressing us by its unanimity, so to say, or quasi-unanimity, as modern science in a way does, where there is at least some notion of the identity of method if not necessarily of teaching.[32] Here we have an anarchy. This of course could not have escaped men at earlier ages. But what was the conclusion which earlier men drew from it? Those who were duly impressed by it became skeptics and said: Well, this is obviously an enterprise beyond human power for one reason or another; it is not a feasible thing. But the political philosophers themselves were not deterred by that scandalous state of their own pursuit. On the other hand, they did not pay particular attention to it. I mean, they knew it, but they did not pay attention to it. And the very strange thing is that after Rousseau, or after Vico, this fact had to be faced for the first time: How can the variety of political philosophies be reconciled with its truth, with the possibility of political philosophy? Is this variety merely a disgraceful fact, or does it make sense? And now the observation by virtue of which it proved to make sense is this.[33] Every[one] can see, when he reads Aristotle's *Politics*, say, on the one hand, and Locke's *Civil Government* on the other, that either Aristotle is right and then Locke is wrong, or vice versa. Of course they may both be wrong, but they are surely incompatible.[34] There is chaos: *n* political philosophers—twenty, forty—a Babel of disharmonious sounds. And then someone made this observation: there is no disharmony; there is perfect harmony, if you consider the context. Aristotle is concerned with the Greek city, Locke is concerned with the British state around 1688, and if you take these obvious facts into consideration, then the conflict disappears. They do not contradict each other, because they speak in a way about different things. I suppose this is so elementary that it is taught—not even explicitly taught, but taken for granted—in the general civilization courses. Generally stated: doctrines are functions of times. Yes?

Student: Could you give us an idea of who said that?

LS: I will gradually come to that. (This is a minor rhetorical device, for which you must forgive me.) Here is what I wrote down, literally: Now the first great thinker who paid proper attention to this state of affairs was Hegel. This problem was in the air prior to him.[35] [The last section of Kant]'s *Critique of Pure Reason*—it is very brief, four pages

[xxxvi] *Second Treatise*, sec. 15.

in the *Critique*—has the strange title "The History of Pure Reason."[xxxvii] Wholly unimaginable in earlier thought that pure reason itself could have a history. And Kant meant it with many qualifications, but still, that he could speak of that was a sign of the times. In Hegel's words, the individual—and he meant by that not only thoughtless individuals but the most thoughtful men, the philosophers—is the son of his time, and not in the way in which he shaves or wears clothes, but in his highest and most sublime and abstruse thoughts. This was corrected somewhat later by Nietzsche, but fundamentally in agreement with Hegel, that the philosopher is the stepson of his time, i.e., is not in step with his time. But this of course means that what he teaches all belongs to the time nevertheless.

Now Hegel, who had seen that the individual is the son of his time, thought as little as any of his predecessors that his political philosophy is true only for his time. In other words, Hegel had realized that Aristotle was right for his time, Locke for his, and[36] [each of] the others for his. But as for Hegel, he was "quote, as 'naïve'" as these earlier thinkers had been when presenting the true teaching. Now this couldn't be, that would be wholly unintelligible. Hegel justified the absoluteness of his political philosophy contrasted with the nonabsoluteness of the earlier philosophies by this consideration: Each philosophy belongs to a moment in time, but there is an absolute moment, and the philosophy which belongs to the absolute moment is the absolute philosophy. [Mild laughter] Yes, it sounds funny. But we will have occasion later on to see whether this is not absolutely inevitable, something of this kind, once you take the question of history seriously in this way. Now the official reasoning of Hegel can be stated as follows. Hegel wrote in the early nineteenth century, when Germany surely was a Christian country. All his addressees were Christians, and naturally they took it for granted that Christianity is the true religion or, as Hegel calls it, the absolute religion. And for Christianity there is of course an absolute moment: resurrection. And just as there is an absolute moment in Christianity, there is an absolute moment in history, in profane history, for the following reason. Christianity appeared first in a wholly pagan world, the Roman Empire, in radical opposition to that pagan empire. Then expansion of Christianity in the Roman Empire, the migrations: a Christian order, a Christian world, emerges in the Middle Ages. Here you have Christianity, not separated outside of the world of politics, but informing it. Yet in informing it in that way there is a fundamental distinction between the Christian proper, the spiritual, and the temporal, shown especially in the distinction between the power spiritual and the power temporal but also in the distinction between clergy and laymen, and other dualisms.

Now Hegel was not only a Christian but also a Lutheran, a Protestant; and therefore he took it for granted that Protestantism was by far superior to Catholicism. What did Protestantism do? It abolished this dualism: it secularized not only the monasteries, it secularized Christianity. Every Christian is a priest: universal priesthood. Now this secularization of Christianity meant according to Hegel that the world, the *saeculum*, became Christianized fully. The secularization of Christianity is the Christianization of the world. And this culminates—again, I repeat what Hegel says—in the Enlightenment, the great movement following the Reformation and the religious wars. The

[xxxvii] *Critique of Pure Reason* A852/B880–A856/B884.

Enlightenment, according to Hegel's interpretation, only takes the last step in this secularization of Christianity or the Christianization of the world, and that culminates in an event which at first glance seems to be *simply* anti-Christian: the French Revolution. But for Hegel that was not so; Hegel regarded the French Revolution as a quite terrible thing but nevertheless as fundamentally progressive, because it was the first time that, at least on European soil, [in] an old country, the rights of man became the foundation of civil society explicitly in a formula which you surely have heard very frequently: the dignity of man, every man, based on the biblical view that man is created in the image of God. That is a biblical heritage. The secularization of that—that it became politically effective, the basis of all legislation of a new order—this is a consequence of the French Revolution. Of course Hegel[37] saw that the French Revolution had one fundamental defect: it did not show the possibility of government. Proof: the Terror. And therefore what came after the Revolution—Napoleon's work, the *Code Napoléon* and the Napoleonic order, which indeed did not last[38]—[nonetheless] supplied the outlines of what Hegel thought is the rational state: a state based on the recognition of the rights of man,[39] but where government is not simply derivative from the will of the mass of citizens. How it did this in detail is of no interest. I only wanted to make clear this crucial point: that for Hegel, with the establishment of the rational state (of course not yet everywhere, but that is a question of a few generations, that is uninteresting), the fundamental question is now solved. The question of the just state, finally solved, and *it could not have been solved* earlier, namely, prior to the radical secularization of Christianity. History is completed. Only because this is the case can one say that the historical process is rational. How could we know that it is rational, if we[40] [did] not know its completeness? It might be rational up to a certain point, but we wouldn't know until later. Good.

One point I think I should mention. In other words, men now—say, around 1830—live on the peak. However great the achievements of some earlier thinkers and some societies may have been, they are fundamentally defective because the decisive truth has not been known. And the philosophic, theoretical truth and its knowledge are bound up with the actualization of the practically or politically right order. You see, when an earlier thinker, say, Descartes, presented his doctrine about the vortices and so forth,[41] there was no relation whatever to the question of whether the most desirable political society was established. But here in Hegel's case the previous solution of the practical or political problem by the actual establishment of the just order is the condition for the completion of theory, [of] theoretical knowledge. One can explain this as follows. Theory, philosophy, has to do, as one loosely says, with all reality. But how can it do that if reality is incomplete? As long as reality is incomplete, philosophy must be incomplete. Only after reality is completed by the establishment of the just society can philosophy as a study of reality be complete. The difficulty, which appears within Hegel, is indicated by one expression which Hegel uses. He says [that] the owl of Minerva, of the goddess of wisdom, begins its flight in the dusk. The evening of mankind has arrived. The progressive process has been completed. This is just what our heart desires, but it means also [that] there are no longer any fundamental tasks for the human race. The night comes. Therefore the view which Spengler[xxxviii] has popularized in our century about the

[xxxviii] Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), historian, author of *The Decline of the West* (1918).

decline of the West, meaning the decline of all high culture, is a possible implication of Hegel's own thought.[42] Hegel was the great beginning of this historicization, but historicism proper is a post-Hegelian phenomenon, and I will have to speak [of it] later. I think [it would be] better next time. We have a few minutes, which we can devote to an exchange of opinion. Yes?

Student: Way back at the beginning of the lecture, you were speaking of Nagel's distinction between characterizing and appraising. Now if you say that something is anemic, you are judging it in terms of its own ends and constitution. If I say a human being is anemic, there is a standard by which a human being exists, and he deviates from this.[43] I don't appraise, I don't say it is good that he's anemic or it's bad that he's anemic.

LS: Yes, sure. That's what he means.

Same Student: But somehow you said that this distinction wasn't really that clear, the distinction between appraising and characterizing.

LS: Yes, but still, this characterizing statement in such cases means that this thing, whether it is an animal or a chair, whatever it might be, is defective. Now from this[44] in itself no practical conclusions follow. [Take] the simple example of the broken chair which I prefer for some reason, but still I give a reason why[45] I prefer the defective thing to the whole thing. Whereas if someone wants to have a horse—still simpler: A farmer says to a boy, Bring me a horse. And he brings him a lame mare, or he brings him a colt, four weeks old. Then the farmer says: I told you to bring me a horse! He meant, of course, a normal horse. Normal means also grown up. Therefore a colt which is perfectly healthy in my assumption is nevertheless not a horse. You can say that is the simple starting point of Aristotle. When we go over a street, and we come too late because a lot of people prevent us, and all these beings which prevent us walking quickly through the mass are children, or all of them are women, I think we would not simply say, "people prevented us," but we would say [there was] "a mass of children," or "a mass of women." So in other words, our ordinary language contains in itself a pointer towards the normal in the sense of the perfect. But don't think "perfect" means something far-fetched; [it means] "the complete."[46] I think for this reason one cannot leave it at the distinction. I gave the example of the stool pigeon, which is clearly an undesirable human being, yet can be useful in certain contexts. Of course, we must not have a very schematic notion that here are the good things and here are the bad things (and it is in practice very hard to avoid the bad things, and even the bad human beings), but the distinction is nevertheless very necessary. Even if you use a crook, you must know that he is a crook; otherwise you will not have that benefit from him which [LS chuckles] you might reasonably expect.

Student: When Nagel says [that] "X is a crook" doesn't imply that X is undesirable, does he understand that there might be other things about X which make it desirable, or does he say simply that being a crook isn't necessarily undesirable?

LS: Well, you see he does not go into that, that is the trouble. I mean, in all these matters, I believe examples and their discussion [are] so very important, because they open up

then the difficulty, and I think that will always show how many value judgments there are implied all the time. The usual view is so offensive to me above all because of its schematic character.

Same Student: But I think we would have to say, interpreting Nagel, that when he says "X is a crook" does not imply that X is undesirable, what he means is not that you may want to use X for an ulterior motive; it means simply that being a crook, although the word itself has a negative connotation, is not in any real sense undesirable. Someone might say: Well, X is a crook, and therefore is desirable simply on the basis of—

LS: I think he goes somewhat beyond that, I do not know—I think he cannot leave it at that.

Mr. Barber: Mr. Strauss, could you clarify the connection between Nagel's judgment that the principle of causality is logically arbitrary and his position on the fact-value distinction?

LS: I believe that there is no direct connection between the two things.

Mr. Barber: Well then, why was it brought up?

LS: Well,[47] I had a number of arguments regarding the fact-value distinction or social science positivism, and one of them was that positivism turns into historicism, and in the latter connection, I spoke of what he says about causality.

Mr. Barber: Then historicism, as I understood you . . . is regarded by Nagel as an alternative—

LS: Oh, no, no, no. In this respect he is extremely simple, and he rejects historicism and all considerations regarding historicism as wrong. No, no, he is not aware—I mean, that is exactly the point. He believes that nonhistoricist, positive science is absolutely well-protected against any historicist objection. I may take this up next time, what he has to say on this subject. He doesn't see any difficulty there. But what I wanted to show is that whether he sees any difficulty there or not, he is in fact exposed to them, as is shown by his remark on causality. Is this so hard to understand?

Mr. Barber: Yes, sir, it is.

LS: I am sorry, I do not see how I can—keep it in mind, and [we'll] try to clarify it next time. Mr. Glenn?

Mr. Glenn: Mr. Strauss, the owl of Minerva is the symbol of wisdom or philosophy, is that correct?

LS: Well, no. Minerva is the goddess of wisdom. Pallas Athena, in Greek. And the owl was her symbol, yes, and Hegel makes a subtle joke with that: just as the owl flies in the

dusk, so wisdom, philosophy, self-consciousness, emerges when a culture has fulfilled itself and is about to go down.

Mr. Glenn: Does he include both theoretical and practical wisdom there—

LS: He doesn't make any distinction. Well, we will continue next week.

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[1] Deleted "of the value judgment."
[2] Moved "question."
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[4] Deleted "he says the following."
[5] Deleted "is."
[6] Deleted "with being."
[7] Deleted "I once heard."
[8] Moved "whether."
[9] Deleted "Yes."
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[13] Deleted "for example."
[14] Deleted "First it is claimed that a social scientist is making appraising value judgments when he characterizes respondents to questionnaires as uninformed, deceitful or irrational."
[15] Deleted "well"
[16] Deleted "In a way."
[17] Deleted "speaks."
[18] Deleted "if this would not."
[19] Moved "directly."
[20] Deleted "because."
[21] Deleted "they don't even."
[22] Deleted "I remember having read"
[23] Deleted "also Bacon's view"
[24] Deleted "these"
[25] Deleted "and there is."
[26] Moved "need."
[28] Deleted "But the question of Aristotle is, say."
[29] Deleted "whether or not."
[30] Deleted "not."
[31] Deleted "this was the generally accepted—I mean, *not*, no not. But."
[32] Deleted "But."
[33] Deleted "Every type."
[34] Deleted "Now how can we."
[35] Deleted "Kant, the last section of Kant, very brief, four pages, in." Moved "the last section of Kant." Moved "very brief, four pages."
[36] Deleted "all."
[37] Deleted "was not."
[38] Deleted "but it."
[39] Deleted "but not."
[40] Deleted "do."
[41] Deleted "he didn't."
[42] Deleted "But."
[43] Deleted "I don't say."
[44] Deleted "is."
[45] Deleted "do"
[46] Deleted "This is."
[47] Deleted "my argument was this, that—I mean."

Session 6: January 25, 1965

Historicism as the More Serious Challenge to Political Philosophy

Leo Strauss: The death of Churchill[i] is a healthy reminder to academic students of political science of their limitations, the limitations of their craft.

The tyrant stood at the pinnacle of his power. The contrast between the indomitable and magnanimous statesman and the insane tyrant—this spectacle in its clear simplicity was one of the greatest lessons which man can learn, at any time. No less enlightening is the lesson conveyed by Churchill's failure, which is too great to be called tragedy. I mean the fact that Churchill's heroic action on behalf of human freedom against Hitler only contributed, through no fault of Churchill's, to increasing the threat to freedom which is posed by Stalin or his successors. Churchill did the utmost that a man could do to counter that threat—publicly and most visibly in Greece and in Fulton, Missouri.[ii] Not a whit less important than his deeds and speeches are his writings, above all his *Marlborough*, the greatest historical work written in our century, an inexhaustible mine of political wisdom and understanding which should be required reading for every student of political science.[iii]

The death of Churchill reminds us of the limitations of our craft and therewith of our duty. We have no higher duty and no more pressing duty than to remind ourselves and our students of political greatness, human greatness, of the peaks of human excellence. For we are supposed to train ourselves and others in seeing things as they are, and this means above all in seeing their greatness and their misery, their excellence and their vileness, their nobility and their baseness, and therefore never to mistake mediocrity, however brilliant, for true greatness. In our age this duty demands of us in the first place that we liberate ourselves from the supposition that value statements cannot be factual statements.

I turn now to the question Mr. Barber raised at the end of the last meeting, namely: Is there a connection between the distinction which Nagel makes between appraising and characterizing value judgments and his view regarding the status of the principle of causality?

There is no immediate connection. The distinction between the two kinds of value judgments serves the purpose of defending value-free social science, within the limits to

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[i] Churchill died on January 24, 1965, the day before this class session took place.
[ii] Fulton, Missouri: A reference to Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech, delivered at Westminster College in Fulton in March 1946. Greece: Apparently a reference to British support for anticommunist forces in Greece towards the end of World War II, a policy continued by the United States and subsequently expanded into the Truman Doctrine.
[iii] Winston Churchill, *Marlborough: His Life and Times*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

which it can be defended, in his view. What he says about the principle of causality shows that he is involuntarily succumbing to historicism. Nagel himself believes that positivism (the view which he defends) is in no way endangered by the problem of history. But his discussion of the principle of causality shows that he underestimates that danger.

I will show this at somewhat greater length. Let me remind you only of the simple starting point of historicism, the alleged fact that doctrines are functions of time, a historical situation. The question is whether this can be proven by history, by merely historical evidence. It cannot. Before you can establish that, you have first to prove that the doctrine in question is not tenable, because if it were the true doctrine, the relation to a particular time would be of no interest. Presupposed in this historical evidence is that these doctrines are all wrong, a presupposition which needs of course some form of proof before it can be accepted.

Now I would first like to discuss briefly, because of the interest which it has, Nagel's discussion of historicism, and of the view that all doctrines, of course not only those of political philosophy, are historically relative. Let us first see how he states the issue.

"Human behavior is undoubtedly modified by the complex of social institutions in which it develops, despite the fact that all human actions involve physical and physiological factors whose laws of operation are invariable in all societies. Even the way members of a social group satisfy basic biological needs—for instance, how they obtain their living or build their shelters—is not uniquely determined either by their biological inheritance or by the physical character of their geographic environment, for the influence of these factors on human action is mediated by existing technology and traditions[iv] [that is to say, by historical factors—LS]. The possibility must certainly be admitted that nontrivial but reliably established laws about social phenomena will always have only a narrowly restricted generality."[v]

In other words,[1] the claim of positivistic social science that the task of social science is to establish universally valid laws is questioned by the fact of the decisive importance of the variety of historical situations.

"It is therefore clear that the 'historically conditioned' character of social phenomena is no inherent obstacle to the formulation of comprehensive transcultural laws.[vi] [In other words, he regards this objection as unimportant.—LS] The relevance or the validity of a

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[iv] The exact wording in Nagel: "Human behavior is undoubtedly modified by the complex of social institutions in which it develops, despite the fact that all human actions involve physical and physiological processes whose laws of operation are invariant in all societies. Even the way members of a social group satisfy basic biological needs—e.g., how they obtain their living or build their shelters—is not uniquely determined either by their biological inheritance or by the physical character of their geographic environment, for the influence of these factors on human action is mediated by existing technology and traditions."

[v] Nagel, *Structure of Science*, 460.

[vi] Nagel, *Structure of Science*, 464.

generalization for social groups belonging to other societies may be quite uncertain. For example, the generalization (based on a study of American soldiers in World War II) that better-educated men drafted into the armed forces of a nation show fewer psychosomatic symptoms than those with less education, is quasi-general in the above sense[vii] [meaning one cannot be certain that it is simply general and not only quasi-general—LS]. The possibility must be recognized[viii] that in comparison with the variables employed in the past in proposed transcultural laws[2] [meaning that the laws suggested by political scientists or social science in general, that these laws are universally valid—LS] the concepts required for this purpose may have to be much more 'abstract,' may need to be separated by a greater 'logical gap' from the familiar notions used in the daily business of social life, and may necessitate a mastery of far more complicated techniques for manipulating the concepts in the analysis of the actual social phenomena."[ix]

In other words, he means ordinarily in these proposed universally valid laws, terms or concepts are used [which are] taken from modern Western society, and there is not necessarily a correlation to these concepts in other societies. For you have to use much more abstract concepts, and the question of course arises: Can we still recognize phenomena when we use concepts of that extreme abstractness?[3]

This much regarding the historicity of social phenomena. Here, with some hesitation and qualifications, Nagel believes the notion of universally valid social laws is still defensible. But what about the historicity of the concepts used, an issue to which he has already alluded? Now there is a long quotation which I will read to you, and which he introduces as follows:

"A third form of this claim is the most radical of all. It differs from the first variant mentioned above in maintaining that there is a necessary *logical* connection, and not merely a conclusive[x] or causal one, between the 'social perspective' of a student of human affairs and his standards of competent social inquiry, and in consequence the influence of the special value[xi] to which he is committed because of his own social involvements is not eliminable. This version of the claim is implicit in Hegel's account of the 'dialectical' nature of human history and is integral to much Marxist as well as non-Marxist philosophy that stresses the 'historically relative' character of social thought. In any event, it is commonly based on the assumption that, since social institutions and their cultural products are constantly changing, the intellectual apparatus required for understanding them must also change; and every idea employed for this purpose is therefore adequate only for some particular stage in the development of human affairs [and in this sense historically dated—LS]. Accordingly, neither the substantive concepts adopted for classifying and interpreting social phenomena, nor the logical canons used for estimating the worth of such concepts, have a 'timeless validity'; there is no analysis of social phenomena which is not the expression of some special social standpoint, or

[vii] Nagel, *Structure of Science*, 464–65.
[viii] Nagel writes "must also be recognized."
[ix] Nagel has "the analysis of actual social phenomena," *Structure of Science*, 465–66.
[x] Nagel has "contingent."
[xi] The plural, "values," is used in Nagel.

which does not reflect the interests and values dominant in some sector of the human scene at a certain stage of its history."

Now this view is fully familiar to you from the Marxists, but [it] differs from the Marxist position in that it denies that there is some group, like the proletariat, which has the absolutely privileged position of seeing things as they actually are. Each of these social-historical groups sees things in a certain perspective, and none of these perspectives can claim to be superior to any other.

"In consequence, although a sound distinction can be made in the natural sciences between the origin of a man's views and their factual validity [between genesis and validity—LS] such a distinction allegedly cannot be made in social inquiry; and prominent exponents of 'historical relativism' have therefore challenged the universal applicability[xii] of the thesis that 'the genesis of a proposition is under all circumstances irrelevant to its truth.' [This thesis being the thesis by which positivism stands or falls.—LS] As one influential proponent of this position puts the matter [the man in question is Karl Mannheim—LS]: 'The historical and social genesis of an idea would only be irrelevant to its ultimate validity if the temporal and social conditions of its emergence had no effect on its content and form. If this were the case, any two periods in the history of human knowledge would only be distinguished from one another by the fact that in the earlier period certain things were still unknown and certain errors still existed which, through later knowledge were completely corrected.' [Roughly the view obtaining in the natural sciences.—LS] 'This simple relationship between an earlier incomplete and a later complete period of knowledge may to a large extent be appropriate for the exact sciences.[xiii] For the history of the cultural sciences, however, the earlier stages are not quite so simply superseded by the later stages [say, in which Newtonian physics is superseded by nuclear physics—LS] and it is not so easily demonstrable that early errors have subsequently been corrected. Every epoch has its fundamentally new approach and its characteristic point of view, and consequently sees the "same" object from a new perspective.'"[xiv]

And you cannot say that the new perspective is superior to the old one. But it is necessary for the people concerned; because of belonging to this kind of society, to this social group, they cannot help looking at things in this respect.

"'The very principles, in the light of which knowledge is to be criticized, are themselves found to be socially and historically conditioned. Hence their application appears to be limited to given historical periods and the particular types of knowledge then prevalent.'"[xv]

[xii] In original: "adequacy."
[xiii] Nagel inserts here an ellipsis indicating omission of some of the material quoted from Mannheim.
[xiv] Nagel inserts an ellipsis here.
[xv] Nagel, *Structure of Science*, 498–99.

This view is known especially now under the title "sociology of knowledge." Now let us see how Nagel replies to that.

"Even extreme exponents of the sociology of knowledge admit that most conclusions asserted in mathematics and natural science are neutral to differences in social perspective."[xvi]

LS: In other words, a proletarian mathematician and a mathematician who is the prince would learn the same mathematics, and also whether they are Westerners or Easterners wouldn't make any difference. That is in a crude way also true. Nagel goes on: "Why cannot propositions about human affairs exhibit a similar neutrality"—why not? And then he adds the qualification which I, if I had this position, would regard as favorable—"at least in some cases?" Because the question arises: Are these not likely to be the trivial and uninteresting cases? But here comes the decisive point.

"In the second place, the claim of these sociologists of knowledge[xvii] faces a serious and frequently noted dialectical difficulty—a difficulty that proponents of the claim have superseded[xviii] only by abandoning the substance of the claim. For let us ask what is the cognitive status of the thesis that a social perspective enters[xix] into the content as well as the validation of every assertion about human affairs. Is this[xx] meaningful and valid only for those who maintain it and who thus subscribe to certain values because of their distinctive social commitments? If so, no one with a different social perspective can properly understand it; its acceptance as valid is strictly limited to those who can do so, and social scientists who subscribe to a different set of values ought therefore dismiss it as a lot of empty talk.[xxi] Or is the thesis singularly exempt from the class of assertions to which it applies, so that its meaning and truth are not inherently related to the social perspectives of those who assert it? If so, it is not evident why the thesis is so exempt; but in any case, the thesis is then a conclusion of inquiry into human affairs that is[xxii] 'objectively valid' in the usual sense of this phrase—and, if there is one such thesis, [xxiii] it is not clear why there cannot be others as well."[xxiv]

Well, one can say very simply that this thesis, that no universally valid knowledge of human affairs is possible, claims itself to be universally valid. And therefore there is something wrong. You can avoid this by all kinds of logical tricks, but ultimately this difficulty is a hard one. Therefore, on this ground, Nagel regards this difficulty as finished.

[xvi] Nagel, *Structure of Science*, 500.
[xvii] The words "of these sociologists of knowledge" are a restatement, not in Nagel.
[xviii] In Nagel: "succeeded in meeting" (not "superseded").
[xix] Nagel has "social perspective enters essentially."
[xx] Nagel has "Is the thesis."
[xxi] In original: "its acceptance as valid is strictly limited to those who can do so, and social scientists who subscribe to a different set of social values ought therefore dismiss it as empty talk."
[xxii] Nagel has "presumably" here.
[xxiii] In original: "conclusion."
[xxiv] Nagel, *Structure of Science*, 500.

In a way I agree with him, but I believe he underestimates the danger of historicism. A universally valid social science must be based on historical knowledge. But all historical knowledge is selective, of course. Who could make use, in history, of every detail? Most of the details are lost, anyway, and there are no universally valid principles of selection.[4] [To] take[5] an example: when we read passages today in the ’50s and ’60s we are quite struck by the awful stories of the Terror and the Thaw, something which we have experienced in our age even without being, fortunately, immediately exposed to this terrible experience.[xxv] The experience opens us up to something to which we would not be open, at least not to the same degree, and this is the experience of men of a particular time. Or[6] take the example which I discussed on a former occasion: Max Weber’s distinction between the three principles of legitimacy, rational, traditional, and charismatic. This is related to the experiences of the nineteenth century, and therefore belongs to that age. In a different age, say in 2100, an entirely different fundamental distinction might present itself, not on account of any progress of science, mind you, as it happens all the time in our society, but on account of changes in society, which one cannot possibly call progressive or the opposite, even the prohibition against value judgments.

Now Nagel does not discuss this issue at all; therefore he fails to discuss what is at issue. Without being aware of it, he is confronted by the problem in his discussion of science in general, not only social science, or history, but science in general, namely, in his discussion of causality. I remind you of what I read to you last time, that the principle of causality as understood by present-day natural science is logically arbitrary and historically contingent. At a certain moment, men, say, the founders of modern science, chose this understanding of causality in preference to any other, and this is ultimately not intelligible except as a contingent fact. Because as I said at that time, if one says that modern science leads to enormous practical possibilities and progress which would be impossible on the basis of any other understanding of causality, the question arises whether this criterion is objectively valid given the fact that modern science itself constitutes the problem. Or, more simply stated, to say that modern science is good is a value judgment which is forbidden by the demand of the new science.

I hope I have now cleared this up, Mr. Barber. Because the question, of course, in spite of what Nagel says, is that the difficulty is ultimately not only social science, or the sciences dependent directly on human society, but finally in the natural sciences and mathematics as well. I will gradually explain that.

I began to take up the question of historicism last time and spoke especially of Hegel’s great attempt of reconciling political philosophy in the traditional sense, i.e., the claim to present the true teaching regarding the just society, with the fact of historical variety of political philosophies. Now Hegel’s general solution, as you may remember, was that the historical process is a rational process, a progressive process which leads to a peak, to an absolute time, to an absolute moment, in which the true doctrine, which will no longer be

[xxv] A reference to Soviet repression under Stalin and to Nikita Khrushchev’s policy of de-Stalinization initiated in the mid-1950s.

superseded by a truer doctrine, belongs to the absolute moment. Now here the difficulties do not yet arise. (Of course, they arise in this way, that you would have to examine [whether] Hegel's doctrine,[7] [his] philosophy of right, is the sound and true doctrine or not. In other words, in this respect Hegel's philosophy would have to be criticized as any other political philosophy would have to be criticized.) The problem of history arises only afterwards, and in the following manner. These men[xxvi] still accept the [. . .][xxvii] view that also is historical, i.e., belongs to a specific historical situation. Contrary to Hegel, they assert that history is unfinished and unfinishable. It can be finished externally by nuclear war, by catastrophe, but in itself it has no principle or end. And this historical process is not a rational process; it cannot be a rational process because it is not yet completed, and we do not know what will come afterwards. It is not progressive, because all standards with a view to which we assert progress or its opposite are themselves historical. "Every epoch is immediate to God," as Ranke, the famous German historian, wrote, i.e., every epoch is immediate to the truth.[xxviii] It is not so that the last epoch, the final epoch, is more immediate to the truth than the early epochs.

This is today trivial. I mean, the equality of all ages and all cultures is a tacit premise of present-day social science. It is not any longer so called, but it is in fact the case.[8] Think only of a similar case: All cultures are equal. That was popularized especially by Spengler, and when this was taken over by American anthropology, Ruth Benedict especially, it was applied to all cultures, not only to the six or seven high cultures to which Spengler had applied it.[xxix] What we know as truth differs from epoch to epoch. There is not *the* truth. We cannot help regarding certain things as truths, but we know that[9] [they] will not be so regarded by a later age, or for that matter, by a past age. This fact, this historical relativism, is the most comprehensive knowledge at which we can arrive. In other words, the highest theme of human knowledge is the fact of the variety of *Weltanschauungen,* as the Germans say, of comprehensive views of the whole. You may remember what I said on the occasion of Nagel: we arrive at a logically arbitrary, historically contingent[10] principle of causality. But you can also say: the way in which time or space is understood. And the sequence of these comprehensive views which underlie all science, in particular, this is the most comprehensive thing. Now this view gradually developed in the nineteenth century, and then in the recent past its problematic character was seen and faced for the first time by Nietzsche, in his essay "On the Use and Abuse of History," of which I have to say something.

According to Nietzsche, history teaches a truth that is deadly. It shows that culture is possible only if men are fully dedicated to principles of thought and action which they do

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[xxvi] Post-Hegelian historicists, presumably. Strauss's point seems to be that while both Hegel and his successors understood that people see things differently at different times, this historicist insight became problematic when the successors rejected the Hegelian view of historical progress leading to the "absolute moment" at which it became clear that every truth belongs to its specific circumstances.

[xxvii] The transcript has a blank space here.

[xxviii] Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), typically regarded as the founder of modern scientific history as a discipline distinct from Hegelian philosophy.

[xxix] Ruth Benedict (1887–1948), American anthropologist.

not question and cannot question, which limit their horizons and thus enable them to have a character, a style, a culture. An unlimited horizon, so to speak, as the nineteenth-century and twentieth-century historians claim they have, can no longer be bound to one particular character and style. And the same is characteristic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the restoration of earlier foreign styles—in architecture, for instance, introducing styles into a context in which they do not fit at all—was only a consequence of this fundamental defect. History shows us at the same time that the principles of thought and action do not possess the validity which they claim, that they do not deserve to be regarded as simply true. The only way out seems to be that one turn one's back on this lesson of history, this deathly lesson, that one choose life-giving delusions rather than deadly truth—in [other] words, that one fabricate a myth, an ideology. This has in the meantime become very popular, and you are all familiar with that.

But this way out is impossible for men of intellectual probity because it is a deliberate self-delusion, and this is to say nothing of the fact that a fabricated myth is not a genuine myth. The true solution comes to sight once one realizes the essential limitations of history, of objective history, and of objective knowledge in general. Objective history, which shows us the common coming-into-being and perishing of all cultures and *Weltanschauungen* and that they deserve to perish ultimately, [11]suffices for destroying the illusion of the objective validity of any principle of thought and action. It does not suffice for opening up a genuine understanding of history. The objective, scientific historian cannot grasp the substance of the past, because he is a mere spectator, not dedicated or committed to any substantive principles of thought and action. And this is the consequence of his having realized that such principles have no objective validity. But committed men, as the men belonging to high culture, can only be understood by committed men and not by neutral bystanders. An entirely different conclusion must be drawn from the realization of this objective truth, namely, that there is only a relative validity for all principles of thought and action. The different values respected in different epochs have no objective support, although they claim to be based on reason, and were claimed to be based on divine revelation at one time or another. But this was a delusion, that they had such support; in fact, they are human creations. They owe their being to a free human project that formed the horizons within which a culture was born. What man did in the past unconsciously and under the delusion of submitting to what is independent of his creative act, he must now do consciously, which is, one can say, the final solution. I read to you a statement which shows in a very impressive and clear way how Nietzsche viewed this. This is taken from *Zarathustra*, the first part, "Of the Thousand and One Goals."

"And Zarathustra found no greater power on earth than good and evil [meaning men cannot live without notions of good and evil—LS]. No people could live without first esteeming; but if they want to preserve themselves, then they must not esteem as the neighbor esteems [because if they agreed in most important respects, then they would not preserve their own being—LS]. Much that was good to one people was scorn and infamy to another: thus I found it. Much I found called evil here, and decked out with purple honors there. Never did one neighbor understand the other: ever was his soul amazed at

the neighbor's delusion and wickedness. [The tacit implication for the modern historian: *he* is not amazed. He takes it in his stride that there are *n* different notions of good and evil.—LS]
"A tablet of the good hangs over every people [i.e., the value system appears to be independent—LS]; behold, it is the tablet of their overcomings; behold, it is the voice of their will to power.
"Praiseworthy is whatever seems difficult to a people; whatever seems indispensable and difficult is called good; and whatever liberates even out of the deepest need, the rarest, the most difficult—that they call holy. . . .
"Verily, my brother, once you have recognized the need and land and sky and neighbor of a people, you may also guess the law of their overcomings, and why they climb to their hope on this ladder. [In other words, there is a partial possibility of understanding a people, namely, by considering their 'need, land, sky and neighbor.'—LS]
"'You shall always be the first and excel all others: your jealous soul shall love no one, unless it be the friend'—that made the soul of the Greek quiver: thus he walked the path of his greatness.
"'To speak the truth and to handle bow and arrow well'—that seemed both dear and difficult to the people who gave my name to me[xxx] [the Persians—LS].
"'To honor father and mother and to follow their will to the root of one's soul'—this was the tablet of overcoming that another people hung up over themselves and became powerful and eternal thereby [the Jews—LS].
"'To practice loyalty and, for the sake of loyalty, to risk honor and blood even for evil and dangerous things'—with this teaching another people conquered themselves [the Germanic people—LS]; and through this self-conquest they became pregnant and heavy with great hopes. . . .
"Change of values—that is a change of creators [namely, the values are all created, they are not in being by themselves—LS].
"First, peoples were creators [he has given four examples—LS] and only in later times, individuals. Verily, the individual himself is still the most recent creation [a radical change has taken place—LS]. . . .
"The delight in the herd is more ancient than the delight in the ego; and as long as the good conscience is identified with the herd, only the bad conscience says: I.
"Verily, the clever ego, the loveless ego that desires its own profit in the profit of the many—that is not the origin of the herd, but its going under.
"Good and evil have always been created by lovers and creators. The fire of love glows in the names of all the virtues, and the fire of wrath.
"Zarathustra saw many lands and many peoples. No greater power did Zarathustra find on earth than the works of the lovers: 'good' and 'evil' are their names. [In other words, what Nietzsche means by "will to power" is the same as love and creativity.—LS]
"Verily, a monster is the power of this praising and censuring. Tell me, who will conquer it?[xxxi] Tell me, who will throw a yoke over the thousand necks of this beast? [A thousand different value systems—LS]

[xxx] In Nietzsche: "who gave *me* my name—*the name which is both dear and difficult* to me."
[xxxi] Strauss omits the words "O brothers."

"A thousand goals have there been so far, for there have been a thousand peoples. Only the yoke for the thousand necks is still lacking: the one goal is lacking. Humanity still has no goal.
"But tell me, my brothers, if humanity still lacks a goal—is humanity itself not still lacking too?"[xxxii]

So a universal goal, a goal for humanity, a goal which transcends historical particularity, becomes possible only after the historical insight into the historical relativity of all previous systems. This is what Nietzsche meant by "the transvaluation of all values." It is a radically new project, different from the former projects not only in its content but also in its mode, because it is based on the consciousness that this new goal is due to a human creation, whereas the older goals were all held to be based on objective supports. The transvaluation of all values entails the rejection of all earlier values, for they have become baseless by the realization of the baseless character of their claim by which they stand or fall, [the claim to objective validity].[12] But precisely the realization of the origin of all such principles makes possible a new creation that presupposes that realization and is in agreement with it, and therefore is intellectually honest. Yet it is not deducible from the historicist insight, for otherwise it would [not] be due to a creative act performed with intellectual probity. Now in Nietzsche's view these creative acts to which all values owe their being have the characteristic peculiarity that they transcend reality, reality which is the product or sediment of earlier creative acts. And we can never reach the point where no creative act has occurred. It is of the essence of man to create a world, for the world, which we regard as being in itself and merely the object of human perception and discovery, is primarily the product of human creation or interpretation. Men create such worlds and yet strive beyond them. And this is what Nietzsche has in mind when he speaks of the will to power, the overcoming of what is, the transcending of what is, and not because of any defects which the actual worlds possess, because then history would be a rational progressive process. That he indicates by the term "will to power."

Nietzsche took a further step. Having believed [himself] to have discovered the will to power, the root of all human history, he universalized that. All beings are characterized by the will to power. In other words, he arrived at a metaphysical doctrine, old-style. But here was the great difficulty: what was the status of that metaphysical doctrine? Is it an interpretation, a subjective act of the thinker Nietzsche? Or is it an historical, objective truth? And this is not clear. Nietzsche felt the necessity of having recourse in the last analysis to an objective truth. One can say [that] Nietzsche relapsed into metaphysics. Nietzsche's effect on our age is due to the apparent necessity to preserve Nietzsche's understanding of history without following him in his relapse into metaphysics. The most famous name for that is "existentialism," which preserves Nietzsche's view of the subjectivity of the fundamental truth but frees it from metaphysics. And I can only speak in very general terms of that; otherwise it would lead us too far afield.

The fundamental defect of all metaphysics, according to this view, is the assumption that there are eternal, or sempiternal, truths. And from this point of view, the significance of

[xxxii] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, First Part, §15, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, 170–72.

history allegedly cannot be understood. The natural sciences create no difficulty because, as Nietzsche has said before and has now repeated: Every physics depends on a metaphysics, and the question is, exactly: What is it that causes these metaphysics? Here [there] cannot be historical objectivity: all understanding of historical phenomena is relative to the standpoint of the present thinker or historian. It is impossible to understand the thought of the past exactly as the thinkers of the past understood it; nor is it possible to understand it better than they.[13] One can only understand it differently, in such a way that you cannot say that the understanding reached, say, fifty years from now will be better than the understanding which we now have. All understanding of another's thought means a[14] "melding," as it has been called (I think a rather bad metaphor) of horizons.[xxxiii] That of our horizon with the horizon of the Greek thinkers. But since these horizons differ from age to age, there can never be the same understanding; there can never be historical objectivity.

Now here there are very great difficulties, which show to me, at any rate, most manifestly the inadequacy of this historical perspective. But before I go on, I will try to make it somewhat clearer by speaking of an English thinker who has presented an approximation to this view. I would like to see whether I have made myself clear enough. Or rather, I am sure I have not made myself clear enough . . . Let me repeat the main point: that here in this radical historicist position, as sketched first by Nietzsche, the whole realm of science, of rational knowledge, is understood to be itself dependent on nonrational presuppositions, which belong to a certain historical period, shorter or longer, and having no validity in themselves. The utmost we can reach is an understanding of these ultimate presuppositions, which we may also call "absolute" presuppositions, and their sequence, or more precisely, the realization that this is the character of human thought, of the human condition: never to reach anything which can be called eternal or sempiternal.

Student: Could you go over again what is the validity, then, of this historical insight? Where does that validity come from? How is that separated from the other part?

LS: What do you mean by that? How[15] one establishes the fact?

Same Student: Yes.

LS: Well, let us take this very simple example we found in Nagel. We found that he said the fundamental principle of modern science was the principle of causality. This principle is not self-evident, but is logically arbitrary. And in addition, it emerged at a certain time, in the seventeenth century; this fact implies there was a different understanding of causality before [then]. And there is no difficulty in assuming that there were a variety of understandings of causality in different times and different cultures, and also, therefore,

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[xxxiii] Strauss seems to be referring here to the argument concerning the "fusion of horizons" put forward by Hans Georg Gadamer in *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1960) [*Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1990). An exchange of letters between Strauss and Gadamer concerning the interpretation of texts was published as Leo Strauss–Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 2 (1978): 5–12.

why not in the future? This fundamental contingency of the principles of thought and action—that is the premise which they assume, of course: that they[xxxiv] have been established. But even a man like Nagel, who is very much opposed to historicism, admits, as you see, the great plausibility that this possesses in our age. And then one must think about that and try to understand all our fundamental concepts in redefinitions, in reinterpretations: above all, the concept of truth. I mean, truth can no longer simply mean what it had originally meant, if the highest principles have this contingent character. The question would then be to understand what is the root of the creative act, of this act of creating historical worlds. I can say to you the mere words in which this question has been formulated, but I do not know whether this will help.[16] [It] is the following: all beings, I mean the totality of things—with these, understanding is in principle concerned. Now the question arises: traditional metaphysics, which is [still, according to a well-known view], underlying[17] even our physics, which is allegedly nonmetaphysical, was the quest for the most fundamental being or beings. Whether it is god or atoms does not affect the character of the question. But there is a primary question which is not faced by traditional metaphysics, namely: What is a being? What is a being?

Now let me discuss this a bit more. When Aristotle discusses the question regarding numbers and his difference from Plato in this respect, he says [that] the issue is not the being of numbers, what numbers are, but the manner of their being.[xxxv] Now what does he mean by that? The primary question for Plato, from Aristotle's point of view, is: What is it? The so-called essences, like cats, dogs, prime numbers, what have you. But there is a more subtle question, namely, the question of the manner of being. For example, a number *is* not in the manner in which a living being is. Do you see that? So therefore the question of the manner of being is a more fundamental question, of course, raised by Plato and by Aristotle. But this is now taken in a much more radical sense. And the final formulation is this: *to be* is not a being, and that *to be* is the most fundamental question never properly raised in metaphysics. As a matter of fact, that is the definition of metaphysics, that it never raises this question. Now this has become difficult to express in English. In German one may use *Sein* and *Seiendes*. It was then also translated into French, *être* and *étant*. In English it is hard to say the difference. But still, that is the formula which I present to you only as an indication of the problem. Now the key point is this: this *to be*, this *Sein*, which is to begin with a wholly mysterious thing, is the ground of history, and only of history, historical work. And therefore, only in the light of this revelation of *to be* can one understand anything, including the objects of natural science. Forget about these terms, which would lead too far; but the creative act, not so much of men but going on somehow through men and within men, these are the ultimate things beyond which we cannot go, and these the fundamental questions. History is, so to say, the only theme of philosophy, but history understood by itself: not the battle of Waterloo or something of this kind, but the fundamental changes in human understanding of the world. Also, if you want to use the traditional term, the categories in which men understand change from historical epoch to historical epoch, and this change of the categories and their ground, this is the theme of philosophy. All the traditional themes are mediate ones, relegated to a very secondary or tertiary state by this fundamental

[xxxiv] "They," i.e., the contingency of the principles.
[xxxv] See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 13 and 14.

change.[xxxvi] This is the only way in which the historicist position could be maintained, and all simpler versions are subject to great difficulties. I may make it a bit clearer if I speak of that English version (which is earlier) of historicism and—we can come back to that later. Yes, Mr. Glenn?

Mr. Glenn: Earlier you said that a historian truly couldn't understand the past unless he committed himself. Why is that?[xxxvii]

LS: . . . philosophy. We can make bibliographies which can be very useful, but you must admit that is not history of philosophy. So that if he is a man who does not have sympathy for political life, for political motivations, can he be a political historian? Again, he can be an excellent bibliographer, no doubt, and typist and what have you, but he cannot possibly be more. Now the key point that is made here by these people is that if you are only a bystander, if you stand outside of the process, you cannot understand the process itself.

Student: To understand the process[18] means that you understand that these commitments are purely subjective and your choice—why do you have to choose them to understand that other people do?

LS: Well, since I am not a historicist, I am perhaps not the best defender of this position. Still, there is [doubtless] some element of truth[19] in that. There is an old saying, of very early times: Similar things are understood only by similar things. One could make this objection to Nietzsche: these merely objective historians whom he attacks were in all interesting cases not merely objective historians. They were all dedicated to certain ideas, whether that of political progress or of German nationalism, or whatever. The strictly objective historian barely existed, and even today is hard to find.[20] Is there not a necessity for empathy in order to be a good historian? If he is entirely indifferent to his subject matter, can he be a good historian? In other words, if he studies some particular subject and he could as well study any other subject, is there not a certain deficiency there? Must there not be some reason which makes this particular subject important to him? This is not necessarily true on every level, but can there be a great achievement of a historian without that?

I do not believe that this concerns a fundamental issue, except [that] in this case[21] the question is: Is objective knowledge ultimately possible? That is the key point. The traditional view from the Greeks on is that it is possible. It is possible to devote one's life to seeing things as they are. Nietzsche has a very simple but true presentation of the issue. The traditional notion of knowledge—here [LS writes on the blackboard] the pure mind intuits the pure ideas, in spite of many changes, very profound changes, in all respects. The pure mind has been replaced to a certain extent by experience (and of course, who believes in Platonic ideas?) but fundamentally, this notion: something in man is open to the truth, in a fundamentally receptive manner. As the tradition has it, the adequation of

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[xxxvi] Strauss refers here to the argument made by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time,* trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

[xxxvii] The tape was changed at this point; the recording resumes in mid-sentence.

the intellect to the thing . . . this is the view of objective truth. And what became doubtful in the nineteenth century and more so in our age is whether this is the true view of knowledge and therewith the true view of the situation. The opposite view would be stated as follows: knowledge is fundamentally spontaneous. Kant says it is understanding which prescribes nature its laws. It is not the understanding which perceives, grasps, the laws of nature, but by its spontaneity the understanding prescribes, it creates a framework within which we can interpret the sense data rationally, intelligibly. This framework is not within what we perceive; it is a spontaneous act of the understanding. Now radicalize that in the light of the so-called "experience of history." These interpreting frameworks change from epoch to epoch; and then you have creative acts, which ultimately cannot be explained, because every explanation is in terms of specific categories, of this or that category—which categories are now questioned, and not the unquestioned premise. The ultimate supposition, the ultimate fact at which we arrive, is the unaccountable contingent change of these frames of reference. Yes?

Student: I am confused now as to the relationship, or the difference, between existentialism and historicism.

LS: That is a very long issue. There is a certain arbitrariness of usage. Existentialism, in many interpretations which the word has had, has nothing to do with historicism, I know that. But in the philosophically most important form which existentialism has taken, it is identical with the most radical historicism; therefore I prefer to speak of historicism. One must mention the name of Heidegger, by far the greatest thinker of this school, even of our age—but[22] in Heidegger's thought, existence and historicity are inseparable. In order to keep up the connection with the historical movement of the nineteenth century, and to remind myself in other ways, I prefer to speak of historicism. I quote to you one sentence. Heidegger says somewhere, in one of his first great works: it is self-evident, or obvious, that every science of an age depends on the *Weltanschauung* of that age. That is crucial. By this very fact, the derivative character of all science, including mathematics and natural science, is admitted. Science,[xxxviii] according to the older view which Heidegger's teacher Husserl maintained: here is science, here is *Weltanschauung*. And even today that is the commonsense view. Heidegger says from the very beginning: No, that is a dependence of science on *Weltanschauung*. That means the *Weltanschauung* rests on acts of the will and is not merely a theoretical matter. It is clear that knowledge of the most important things is not purely theoretical but at the same time has an element of will in it. I can only remind you of the simple scheme suggested by Nietzsche, which is historically correct. This was the old view: knowledge, [I mean the highest knowledge], is of something independent of the human will,[23] and this knowledge is fundamentally receptive. (How much spontaneity might be required for getting into the state of receptiveness—) And the opposite view is rejection of that—that the truth is primarily due to such creative acts. Vulgar historicism is traced to man; in the subtle and theoretical historicism of Heidegger, [it is] traced to what he calls *Sein*, which is *x*, the ground of all history, working in and through man. Yes?

[xxxviii] Sc. is independent of *Weltanschauung*.

Student: You said that the existentialists could not accept Nietzsche's metaphysics, and I'm not clear as to where Nietzsche presents a metaphysics.

LS: Nietzsche has a doctrine of the will to power, and he saw in the will to power (whatever that may mean) the essence of every being. I mean not only of man, but of every being. Now the starting point of existentialism is that there is a radical difference between man and nonman, so that no such formula applies to both. The manner of being of man differs radically from the manner of being of anything else. This alone would be a reason against Nietzsche. But the will to power has the same status in a way as the pure mind in Hegel, or in a different way in Aristotle: something which is eternal. The key point in this radical historicism is that there is nothing eternal, at least that we do not know of anything eternal, and cannot know of it, and what we can reach is ultimately this ground for the creative acts underlying all historical worlds, which Heidegger calls *Sein*.

Now I would like to turn here to an English writer, because this is much more simple when we are speaking in English, who I think is the clearest representative of historicism in the English tongue, and that is R. G. Collingwood, who was formerly professor at Oxford. He wrote a book, *The Idea of History*, which is a detailed discussion of the problem of history, but it suffers from the great defect that it was not edited by Collingwood but by some of his students from his papers, and it is surely not [a] finished,[24] complete book. But he wrote earlier, and published himself, an autobiography, which is of course much more sketchy than that book on history is, but at the same time it is finished and made ready for publication by Collingwood.[xxxix] I will read to you a few passages.

His work in archaeology—Roman Britain was his subject—which he conducted, however, in a way in which very few archaeologists do, namely, reflecting on what he was doing and reflecting on that in a philosophical manner, this led him to a question of logic.

"The *Novum Organum* of Bacon and the *Discours de la Méthode* of Descartes[xl] began to have a new significance for me. They were the classical expressions of a principle in logic which I found it necessary to restate: the principle that a body of knowledge consists not of 'propositions,' 'statements,' 'judgments,' or whatever name logicians use in order to designate assertive acts of thought,[xli] but of these together with the questions they are meant to answer; and that a logic in which the answers are attended to and the questions neglected is a false logic."[xlii]

[xxxix] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, ed. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946); Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).
[xl] Collingwood mentions only the titles of these works; the authors' names are understood.
[xli] Here Collingwood inserts parenthetically "(or what in those acts is asserted: for 'knowledge' means both the activity of knowing and what is known)".
[xlii] Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 30.

This is the starting point of his own turning. Logic must be a logic of question and answer, and the primacy is given to the question. The answer can be understood only in terms of the question. You will see very soon how important that is.

"For a logic of propositions [the traditional logic, and in a way present-day logic too—LS] I wanted to substitute what I called a logic of question and answer. It seemed to me that truth, if that meant the kind of thing which I was accustomed to pursue in my ordinary work as a philosopher or historian—truth in the sense in which a philosophical theory or an historical fact[xliii] is called true,[xliv] the proper sense of the word—was something that belonged not to any single proposition [like "Caesar was killed on the Ides of March"—LS] nor even, as the coherence-theorists maintained, to a complex of propositions taken together; but to a complex consisting of questions and answers. The structure of this complex had, of course, never been studied by propositional logic; but with help from Bacon, Descartes, and others I could hazard a few statements about it. Each question and each answer in a given complex had to be relevant or appropriate, had to 'belong' both to the whole and to the place it occupied in the whole. Each question had to 'arise'; there must be that about it whose absence we condemn when we refuse to answer a question on the ground that it 'doesn't arise.' Each answer must be 'the right' answer to the question it professes to answer.
"By 'right' I do not mean 'true' [but "relevant," "pertinent"—LS]."[xlv]

Now what has this to do with the question of history? Propositional logic, as he calls it, dealing with true propositions, with that which makes them true, has no obvious relation to history. But if you understand a proposition in terms of the primacy of human questions, things will look different. The question "To what question did so-and-so intend this proposition for an answer?" is an historical question and therefore cannot be settled except by historical methods.[25] I think the time will be sufficient to read you one passage which indicates to you how much this affects us. We can discuss this at greater length next time. The people whom he opposed (and they were not very impressive men) happened to take the traditional view of knowledge. They

"thought that the problems with which philosophy is concerned were unchanging. They thought that Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, the Stoics,[xlvi] the Cartesians, etc., had all asked themselves the same set of questions, and had given different answers to them. For example, they thought that the same problems which are discussed in modern ethical theory were discussed in Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Ethics*; and that it was a man's work to ask himself whether Aristotle or Kant was right on the points over which they differ concerning the nature of duty."[xlvii]

There are still such people around [laughter] and I would not altogether condemn them, but there is a great difficulty nevertheless.

[xliii] In the place of "fact" Collingwood has "narrative."
[xliv] Collingwood inserts here "which seemed to me."
[xlv] Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 36–37.
[xlvi] Here Collingwood inserts "the Schoolmen."
[xlvii] Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 59.

"The first point at which I saw a perfectly clear gleam of daylight was in political theory. Take Plato's *Republic* and Hobbes's *Leviathan*, so far as they are concerned with politics. Obviously the political theories they set forth are not the same. But do they represent two different theories of the same thing? Can you say that the *Republic* gives one account of 'the nature of the State' and the *Leviathan* another? [The ordinary, vulgar view.—LS] "No; because Plato's 'State' is the Greek *polis*, and Hobbes's is the absolutist State of the seventeenth century. So the vulgar answer is easy:[xlviii] certainly Plato's State is different from Hobbes's, but they are both States; so the theories are theories of the State. Indeed, what did you mean by calling them both political, if not that they were theories of the same thing?

"It was obvious to me that this was only a piece of logical bluff, and that if instead of logic-chopping you got down to brass tacks and called for definitions of the 'State' as Plato conceived it and as Hobbes conceived it, you would find that the differences between them were not superficial but went down to essentials. You can call the two things the same if you insist; but if you do, you must admit that the thing has got *diablement changé en route* [has in a devilish way changed on its way—LS] so that the 'nature of the State' in Plato's time was genuinely different from the 'nature of the State' in Hobbes's. I do not mean the empirical nature of the State [in other words, that they were small in Plato's time and large in Hobbes's time—LS]. I mean the ideal nature of the State [that which they regarded as the best—LS]. What even the best and wisest of those who are engaged in politics are trying to do has altered. Plato's *Republic* is an attempt at a theory of one thing; Hobbes's *Leviathan* an attempt at a theory of something else."[xlix]

There are no eternal problems. The problems change from epoch to epoch.[26] This does not mean there is no connection, but as he makes clear, and [as] we will discuss next time, if you have a problem P—p_1, p_2, p_3, and so on—they differ very greatly from each other, and you understand very little and almost nothing of, say, Plato or of Hobbes if you say: Well, they call it P.[l] Now if the problems differ, then of course the answers must differ. But[27] the fundamental point is not the difference of answers but the difference of questions, and the necessity that the starting point, i.e., the questions, would differ from epoch to epoch. Collingwood develops this further, and we will speak of that later. But let us discuss this quickly in the few minutes we still have. Is there something very important here in what Collingwood says? Is not the vulgar view, the very common view, that all philosophers deal with the same problems and look in fundamentally the same directions, is there not something objectionable in that?

Student: It seems to trivialize the history of thought. No sense of any continuity.

LS: Oh, continuity is not identity. And in addition, I could say: Why should one not trivialize the history of thought? Where is it written that the history of thought is so

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[xlviii] Collingwood has "The 'realist' answer is easy."
[xlix] Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 61–62.
[l] See Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 69.

important? You know, Aristotle and Descartes and quite a few others didn't give us the history of thought, yes? I mean, one would have to argue somewhat differently. Mr. Shulsky?

Mr. Shulsky: Well, that particular example was annoying because he didn't make the necessary argument for it. If he [had] said that Plato and Hobbes were in disagreement because they thought of different ideal states as being the states, so they could never get together, that would be one thing, but instead he seems to say that they don't contradict each other, whereas if the two came together they would have an argument as to how men should live.

LS: That they contradict each other, everybody would see that. But the question is whether they contradict each other[28] by applying, as it were, different predicates to the same thing. And Collingwood says: Is it the same thing? Well, I would say, very simply stated—as a practicing historian, I would say it is a very grave matter if someone translates *polis* by the word "state." A very grave matter. And sometimes, in order to get a better conscience, they apply the term "city-state." This means there is one universal, called "state," which consists of a variety of particulars: city-states, territorial states, empire states, and what have you. One doesn't understand "state" by this. I will take this up at greater length, but when people speak of "state" as they mean it today in the modern centuries, they mean it in contradistinction to society. *Polis* excludes this distinction. One has to dig deeper. I think that[29] Collingwood has a better understanding of the requirements of history than his opponents; the question is only whether the conclusions which he draws from that are well founded. Yes?

Mr. Levy: Couldn't you get out of that difficulty, as a vulgar person, by saying that the laws laid down by Hobbes that the ruler should give and the laws that Plato lays down that his ruler should give are different, but they are both concerned with laws and rulers? And both mean the same thing by "law," namely, that—well, at least controls that are enforced behind their law. Maybe Hobbes had more persuasion behind his law [than] Plato had behind his, but force is present in both sets of laws.

LS: Well, there is another way of evading it—I see your point—for example, say, let us not speak of "state" but let us speak of "commonwealth." And this makes perfect sense, to understand the *polis* as commonwealth, and Hobbes speaks specifically of commonwealth, so there is no difficulty. But this does not go to the root of the matter because of the fact that after the First World War, people thought (and, even today, think) in terms of states, with its various connotations. There is nothing of this kind in Plato and Aristotle, and this must be faced. I think it can be faced and can be solved, but if one does not take the additional trouble, one has no right to maintain that the philosophers deal ultimately with the identically same problems. That must be proven. I would say this is a very simple objection to the crude view: How do you know? Only after you have studied them can we say in fact [that] they deal with the same problems. Good.

Now next time I will speak of Collingwood and then gradually turn to the historical question proper.

[1] Deleted “against.”
[2] Deleted “I.”
[3] Deleted “Now.”
[4] Deleted “If you.”
[5] Deleted “such.”
[6] Deleted “if you.”
[7] Deleted “whether Hegel’s.” Moved “whether.”
[8] Deleted “If you.”
[9] Deleted “it.”
[10] Deleted “say.”
[11] Deleted “objective history”
[12] Deleted “the claim to objective validity.” Moved “objective validity.”
[13] Deleted “But.”
[14] Deleted “ ‘melting.’ ”
[15] Deleted “does.”
[16] Deleted “Now this.”
[17] Moved “still, according to a well-known view.”
[18] Deleted “you have to understand.”
[19] Moved “doubtless.”
[20] Deleted “Must he not.”
[21] Moved “that.”
[22] Deleted “surely he is.”
[23] Moved “I mean the highest knowledge.”
[24] Moved “a.”
[25] Deleted “Now he was confronted with.”
[26] Deleted “There are no eternal problems, but the problems change from epoch to epoch.”
[27] Deleted “the fundamental question is.”
[28] Deleted “by speaking.”
[29] Deleted “than.”

Session 7: January 27, 1965

R. G. Collingwood as an Example

Leo Strauss: We are discussing now the position called historicism. We can say there were two forms of it: a primary or naive historicism, and a radical historicism, the latter being started by Nietzsche. The primary or naive historicism asserts that the historian is a spectator of the historical process, who sees that all principles of thought and action come into being and perish. But he exempts *himself*, his principles of thought and action: he stands on the banks of the river, not in the river. The radical historicist asserts that this is impossible; there is no place outside of the stream. The consequence is that the pride of the naive historian in historical objectivity proves to be unfounded. All knowledge is relative to the historical situation, and this applies to the historian's knowledge as well. There is no objectivity, or what we call objectivity is only a derivative mode of a certain kind of subjectivity. Now I have begun to try to explain historicism somewhat better, in greater detail, by beginning to speak of Collingwood. I limited myself to the *Autobiography*, but in the meantime I thought I should say something about his *Idea of History*, his larger work. This is simplified by the fact that many years ago I wrote a long review article on it, and I will quote from that a few passages.[i]

Now what Collingwood tried to do is to develop what he calls the philosophy of history. Philosophy of history as he understands it necessarily entails a complete philosophy conceived from an historical point of view, for the discovery on which philosophy of history is based concerns the character of all human thought and not merely of historical thought. It leads therefore to an entirely new understanding of philosophy. In other words, it was always admitted that the central theme of philosophy is the question of what man is, and that history is the knowledge of what men have done. But now it has been realized that man is what he *can do*, and the only clue to what man can do is what he has done. Therefore the so-called science of human nature, or of the human mind, resolves itself into history. Philosophy of history is identical with philosophy as such, which has become radically historical. Philosophy as a separate discipline is liquidated by being converted into history. These are very extreme, but therefore clarifying, formulae.

One can say historicism is characterized by the fact that the traditional, and to common sense so obvious, distinction between philosophy and history, between philosophic and historical questions, is abandoned: a fusion of philosophy and history, a complete fusion, is intended. Now whether that is feasible remains to be seen. Now the question consists of two parts: Why is history necessarily philosophic, and why is philosophy necessarily historical? [To] the first question, why is history necessarily philosophic, Collingwood answers: All history is history of thought, by which he means this. Let us take something so seemingly unphilosophic as the Battle of Trafalgar. But what does it mean to understand the Battle of Trafalgar?, Collingwood asks. To understand the thought of

[i] Leo Strauss, "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," *Review of Metaphysics* 5 (1952): 559–86.

Nelson, to understand human thought. In every historical investigation, even in archaeology—archaeology of Roman Britain, which was Collingwood's special interest—when he tries to understand the meaning of fortification, what does it mean? What is this fortification for, i.e., what was the thought of the builders? This is a partial explanation of why history is necessarily philosophic, since it is understanding of human thought.

Another conclusion: Since all thinking is critical thinking and not a mere surrender to the object of thought, rethinking of earlier thought is identical with criticism of earlier thought. The point of view from which the scientific historian criticizes the past is that of the present, of his civilization. Scientific history is therefore to see the human past in its entirety as it appears from the standpoint of the present of the historian's civilization. That is to say, history is self-knowledge, and what is more philosophic than the attempt to know oneself? Yet history will not be self-knowledge if the historian sees the past in the light of the present of his civilization without making that present his primary theme. He must know what the present of his civilization is, in order to understand it. The scientific historian starts, therefore, to show how the present of his civilization, or the mind of the present day, or that determinate human nature which is his civilization, has come into existence. Philosophy being fundamentally self-knowledge (because what does it mean to raise the question of what is man?), this is not feasible according to Collingwood except through history. The consequence of this is that all history, and all philosophy, is relative to the present. Now how can this be justified? Now an analysis would show that two premises are involved: in the first place, an assumption of the superiority of the present. The point of view of the present is the highest point of view that ever existed, and therefore we don't lose anything by looking at the past from the point of view of the present. [1]The second reason, however, which differs from[2] [the first], is the equality of all ages. I read to you: "Augustine looked at Roman history from the point of view of an early Christian. And Gibbon did so from that of an enlightened eighteenth-century Englishman: 'there is no point in asking, which was the right point of view. Each was the only possible for the man who adopted it.'"[ii]

Correspondingly, the present-day historian who looks at the past from the present-day point of view cannot help looking at the past from the present-day point of view, and in this decisive respect, all ages are equal. There is here a difficulty. If the insight into the equality of all ages is the decisive insight, then our age is nevertheless superior to all other ages because only our age has that insight. Is this clear? I have stated it as follows.

"The belief in the equality of all ages is only a more subtle form of the belief in progress. The alleged insight into the equality of all ages which is said to make possible passionate interest in the thought of the different ages, necessarily conceives of itself as a progress beyond all earlier thought: every earlier age erroneously 'absolutized' the standpoint from which it looked at things and therefore was incapable of taking very seriously the thought of other ages; hence earlier ages were incapable of scientific history."[iii]

[ii] "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," 562. Quoted material in the passage is from Collingwood, *Idea of History*, xii.

[iii] "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History," 574.

Now in his *Idea of History*, Collingwood gives us a specimen of his own historical work[3] because he writes a history of history, of historical understanding throughout the ages. And what one can say of that history is only that it is extremely poor as a historical work. Collingwood simply does not take seriously, say, Thucydides, or Tacitus, or Herodotus, and one can[4] understand that because he is so certain of the progress made by nineteenth- and twentieth-century scientific history. [Hence] we draw this conclusion: in order to take the thought of the past seriously, as he *wishes* to do, one must doubt the superiority of present-day thought. Otherwise you do not have an incentive for taking seriously the thought of the past. History, in other words, is required not simply for the sake of self-knowledge but also and above all for the sake of self-criticism—not only to find out that Plato and Aristotle, for example, contributed their[5] share to that beautiful and complete wisdom which we possess, but also [that] we have forgotten many things which Plato and Aristotle knew. And this is at least as important a function of the historian, to recover that loss.

Only a few more points which I wish to make in this connection. Now if this is so, if it is necessary for understanding ourselves and for understanding our limitations to understand the thought of the past, it follows indeed that a fusion of philosophy and history is inevitable, and to that extent I would agree with Collingwood. There is a simple indirect proof. When you look at present-day literature on political and social matters, one observes the shallowness of those present-day thinkers who lack a historical perspective. It is obviously necessary for us to have this historical perspective, and to that extent it is simply true that a fusion of philosophy and history is inevitable. But we must not deceive ourselves about the crucial implication of this seemingly trivial point. In our age the fusion of philosophy and history is necessary, as everyone will see if he begins to think about any question, whether it is democracy or sovereignty and so on. When he wants to have clarity, he has to engage in historical studies. Mostly, people do not engage in historical studies but look up the next encyclopedia or dictionary and get their facts as it were from there, which are in all cases then of course simply very secondary, not to say tertiary, results, [i.e.,] reflections of what some historians (perhaps good ones) have found out.

The mere fact that such a fusion is today practically inevitable implies a radical break with traditional philosophy, in which such a fusion was inconceivable. Now one could say, and[6] [this] is a common view, that this is a progress beyond traditional philosophy: traditional philosophy lacked that peculiar reflectiveness which we have and which induces us to engage in historical studies. But this phenomenon can also be viewed from a very different point of view. Let us take the example of Thomas Aquinas. His political thought was based to a considerable extent on Aristotle. So he had studied Aristotle, he had him at his elbow, we may say. But this was not historical study. Aristotle was “the Philosopher,” the authority in these matters. The basis of his thought, we can say, was contemporary with Thomas Aquinas. Whether he read Aristotle in Greek or Latin is very unimportant here.

But we in our age are in that situation that the bases of our thought are not contemporary with us, and the reason for that is the fact and the notion of progress. Certain crucial decisions were made, say, in the seventeenth century. This was continued. An enormous structure arose. We are high up in that structure, but we are not directly confronted with the foundations. The way of progress, we can say, is this [LS writes on the blackboard]: ever higher and higher. But this[7] implies blindness about the foundations, if this process is not accompanied by an inverse process, the digging up and the understanding of the hidden foundations. So while we modern men are by virtue of this "quote progress" in need of historical studies in order to see again the hidden foundations of our thought, this was not so in all ages. In other words, the fact that we need—*we need*—this fusion of philosophy and history does not mean by itself that our thought is superior to that of the past, in which such a fusion[8] was not necessary and not even possible.[9]

I return now to Collingwood's *Autobiography*. I have read to you a few passages [in] which Collingwood indicates his starting point, namely, a revision of logic, a substitution of a logic of questions and answers for the propositional logic of the past. And I have indicated how this change in logic, the insight into the primacy of questioning, is connected with his historicism. I will now continue. This *Autobiography* is a very spirited book. He was a fighting man, obviously, and the men whom he fought were a school who called themselves "quote realists." Let us see what these people say about the word, because the word "realism" has infinitely many meanings.

Cook Wilson[iv] (by the way, a man well known in Platonic studies; he is one of these realists) asserted: "Knowing makes no difference to what is known." In other words, this piece of furniture is wholly indifferent to my knowing it. This behind me, the blackboard, is the same blackboard whether I view it or not, and the simple proof is that if I turn around I know I will see it. Knowing makes no difference to what is known, a commonsensical view, which doesn't necessarily mean that it's the truth. Collingwood regarded this assertion as meaningless.

"I argued that anyone who claimed, as Cook Wilson did, to be sure of this, was in effect claiming to know what he was simultaneously defining as unknown. For if you know that no difference is made to a *thing* θ *by* the presence or absence of a certain condition *c*, you know what θ is like with *c*, and also what θ is like without *c*, and on comparing the two find no difference. This involves knowing what θ is like without *c*; in the present case, knowing what you defined as the unknown."[v]

Is this clear, what the argument means? When you say [that] knowing makes no difference to what is known, you imply that you know the thing in its status of not-knownness, and this is absurd. For by knowing it, you always know it as known. This is the simple refutation of realism. And this has of course most crucial implications,

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[iv] John Cook Wilson was Wykeham Professor of Logic at New College, Oxford. *On the Interpretation of Plato's* Timaeus: *Critical Studies* (London: Nutt, 1889) was one of the few works published during Wilson's lifetime. Much of his unpublished work appeared in *Statement and Inference*, ed. A.S.L. Farquharson, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926).

[v] Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 44.

because the view which Collingwood ascribes to these men in Oxford is the view of the whole premodern tradition: the view expressed in the definition of truth as the adequation of the intellect and the thing. My thoughts are true if what is in my mind, say, about this piece of furniture, agrees with the thing, the piece of furniture itself, and all imperfections of knowledge are those in which my thoughts do not reflect, do not reproduce, the character of the thing. To think truly means to think what is, to look at what is. Knowledge is fundamentally receptive, in spite of all nonreceptive, spontaneous activities which might be required in a subsidiary fashion.

Now what do we say to Collingwood's argument? I would put it this way: I don't believe it settles the issue. Precisely if it is impossible to say whether truth stems from the human mind or not—because that is of course what Collingwood implies: since we cannot possibly know the thing as it is outside of all relations to the human mind, the truth originates ultimately in the human mind. Now precisely if it is impossible to say that, one must leave the question open.[10] Every one of us finds, even in the greatest disturbances which we can imagine, an order: cats are not dogs; trees are not brutes; stones are not trees; and all these things behave in a peculiar manner, to say nothing of man and the various differences among men. The key question is this: Does this order, this *taxis*, originate in the human mind, or does man, in the process of learning and knowing, awaken to a *taxis*, to an order which is independent of man? Differently stated, the latter view is identical with the view that man is a microcosm, that man is a being privileged by nature to understand or to be open at least to all things whereas brutes are incapable of that, whereas the other view is that there is no such privilegedness of man by nature, but man, a being among all kinds of beings, is the only one capable [of] producing an intelligible order.

Now Collingwood contends, and this is by no means so clear, that the view that nothing is affected by being known leads to consequences both regarding human action and regarding political theory in particular. Now he speaks there of certain developments in Oxford at that time, after the First World War, which run parallel to things with which we now are very familiar, which [11][are] now known in England as the various philosophies, analyses, of language. It was not yet called that way at that time, but Lord Russell played a great role already at that time, and he is a great living link between that diluvian era and our age. I read to you just a passage for illustration.

"Moral philosophy, from the days of Socrates down to our own lifetime, had been regarded as an attempt to think out more clearly the issues involved in conduct, for the sake of acting better. In 1912 one of these men[vi] announced that moral philosophy as so understood was based on a mistake, and advocated a new kind of moral philosophy, purely theoretical, in which the workings of the moral consciousness should be scientifically studied as if they were the movements of the planets, and no attempt made to interfere with them. And Bertrand Russell at Cambridge proposed in the same spirit, and on grounds whose difference was only superficial, the extrusion of ethics from the body of philosophy."[vii]

[vi] In the place of "one of these men" Collingwood has "Prichard."
[vii] Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 47.

Well, this has of course happened in the meantime, only what is called "ethics" has no longer to do with ethics; [it] is no longer a normative discipline but is merely an analysis of ethical language.

"The 'realist' philosophers who adopted this new program were all, or nearly all, teachers of young men and young women. Their pupils, with habits and characters yet unformed, stood on the threshold of life; many of them on the threshold of public life. Half a century earlier, young people in that position had been told that by thinking about what they were doing, or were about to do, they would become likely on the whole to do it better; and that some understanding of the nature of moral or political action, some attempt to formulate ideals and principles, was an indispensable condition of engaging creditably in these activities themselves.[viii] The 'realist'[ix] said to his pupils, 'If it interests you to study this, do so; but don't think it will be of any use to you. Remember the great principle of realism, that nothing is affected by being known. That is as true of human action as of anything else. Moral philosophy is only the theory of moral action: it cannot therefore make any difference to the practice of moral action.'"[x]

Now whether this follows truly from the principle of realism I have my doubt, because Aristotle was a realist in that sense, and Plato too, and yet they had no doubt that knowledge does make a great difference regarding action, although it does not affect things which cannot possibly be affected by human action, like the course of the planets, to take a simple example.

The same happened, of course, also to political theory, that it lost all its use and reasonableness. We come to a more interesting and more immediate problem, to which I alluded last time. The realists, who were in these matters old-fashioned people, however strange this may sound in the case of Russell, [12]took, for example, for granted the distinction between philosophy and history, and denied that there is a fusion between them, possible or necessary. The realists thought that the problems with which philosophy is concerned were unchanging. This is a point which I read to you last time, which Collingwood questions radically.

"Was it really true, I asked myself, that the problems of philosophy were, even in the loosest sense of that word, eternal? Was it really true that different philosophies were different attempts to answer the same questions? I soon discovered that it was not true; it

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[viii] These words are inserted here in Collingwood: "And their teachers, when introducing them to the study of moral and political theory, would say to them, whether in words or not—the most important things that one says are often not said in words—'Take this subject seriously, because whether you understand it or not will make a difference to your whole lives.'"

[ix] Strauss omits "on the contrary."

[x] Collingwood completes the thought: "'People can act just as morally without it as with it. I stand here as a moral philosopher; I will try to tell you what acting morally is, but don't expect me to tell you how to do it.'" *Autobiography*, 47–48.

was merely a vulgar error, consequent on a[xi] kind of historical myopia which, deceived by superficial resemblances, failed to detect profound differences."[xii]

And now there comes a passage which I read to you about the people who say Plato's *Republic* and Hobbes's *Leviathan* deal with the same subject, the nature of the state. And he wonders: How can you translate *polis*, the subject with which Plato is concerned, by "state"? And there is of course something very important implied.

"There is, of course, a connection between these two things [between the thing about which Plato speaks and the thing about which Hobbes speaks—LS] but it is not the kind of connection that the 'realists' thought it was. Anybody would admit that Plato's *Republic* and Hobbes's *Leviathan* are about two things which are in one way the same thing and in another way different. This is not in dispute. What is in dispute is the kind of sameness and the kind of difference. The 'realists' thought that the sameness was the sameness of a "universal" [let us say, commonwealth—LS] and the difference the difference between two instances of that universal."

The commonwealth understood as *polis*, the commonwealth understood as a modern state.

"But this is not so. The sameness is the sameness of an historical process, and the difference is the difference between one thing which in the course of that process has turned into something else, and the other thing into which it has turned. Plato's *polis* and Hobbes's absolutist State are related by a traceable historical process, whereby one has turned into the other; anyone who ignores that process, denies the difference between them, and argues that where Plato's political theory contradicts Hobbes's one of them must be wrong, is saying the thing that is not [the Swiftian formulation for a lie, for an untruth—LS]."[xiii]

Now here of course we reach a point where Collingwood's thesis ceases to be clear, where he is compelled to admit that there is no contradiction between Plato's doctrine and Hobbes's doctrine because they answer entirely different questions, as if it were not possible to raise the question: Whose question is the more profound one? I mean, [it] may be that given the Hobbean question, it could not be answered in Plato's manner—I gladly grant that—but the question concerns then the rank, the order of rank of the questions. Here Collingwood stops. He gives here another example.

"It was not difficult to see that just as the Greek *polis* could not be legitimately translated by the modern word 'State' [which I think is true—LS] except with the[xiv] warning that the two things are in various essential ways different, and a statement of what these differences are; so, in ethics, a Greek word like *dei* cannot be legitimately translated by using the word 'ought,' if that word carries with it the notion of what is sometimes called

[xi] In Collingwood, "the."
[xii] Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 60–61.
[xiii] Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 62.
[xiv] In Collingwood, "a."

'moral obligation.' Was there any Greek word or phrase to express that notion, namely, of moral obligation?[xv] The 'realists' said there was; but they stultified themselves by adding that the 'theories of moral obligation' expounded by Greek writers differed from modern theories such as Kant's about the same thing. How did they know that the Greek and the Kantian theories were about the same thing? Oh, because *dei* (or whatever word it was) is the Greek word for 'ought.'"[xvi]

In other words, this Greek word which has the primary meaning "something is lacking, is needing" of course does not in itself mean "ought," but in certain connections it can approach that meaning.

But the fundamental point which he makes—you have no right to assume that an earlier great thinker *must* have dealt with what *you* regard as the fundamental question—is of course simple common sense.[13] I will read you the conclusion. "Ideals of personal conduct are just as impermanent as ideals of social organization. Not only that, but what is meant by calling them ideals is subject to the same change." Of course. I mean, try to translate the word "ideal" into classical Greek: you wouldn't succeed. There is an equivalent for it, or a half equivalent, but that shows the great difference. "Something for which you would wish or pray," that would be the equivalent, to some extent, of what we mean by an ideal.[xvii] But surely there is no connection, as I might mention in passing, between "ideal" as the word is developed in the seventeenth century and the Platonic *idea*. There is a connection of sorts: without the Platonic concept of *idea*, people would never have come to speak of ideals. But these are very different things.

"The 'realists' knew that different peoples, and the same peoples at different times, held different views, and were quite entitled to hold different views, about how a man ought to behave; but they thought that the phrase 'ought to behave' had a meaning which was one, unchanging, and eternal. They were wrong. The literature of European moral philosophy, from the Greeks onwards, was in their hands and on their shelves to tell them so; but they evaded the lesson by systematically mistranslating the passages from which they might have learned it."[xviii]

And here Collingwood alludes to a very well-known fact, or I think it should be well known: that we are the slaves of the translators. And the translators are in most cases men of an impossible innocence in these matters. They are not aware of what they are doing by translating an important word by the most convenient equivalent in present-day, everyday usage. That's impossible. And that is the reason why it is necessary, if for one reason or another one wants to see the truth about these matters, to learn at least as much of these languages that one can check, with the help of dictionaries, the work of the translators.

[xv] The words "namely, of moral obligation" are a restatement, not in Collingwood.
[xvi] Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 63.
[xvii] Strauss no doubt has in mind the Greek expression *kat' euchēn*, for which see Aristotle, *Politics* 2.1260a29, 4.1295a29, 7.1325b36, etc.
[xviii] Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 65.

We come now to the core of Collingwood's teaching. Traditionally, the central discipline of philosophy was metaphysics. What happened to metaphysics on the basis of the insight into the historicity of all human thought?

"It became clear to me that metaphysics (as its very name might show 'after physics,' though people still use the word as if it had been 'paraphysics' ["by the side of," like "parapsychology"—LS][xix] is no futile attempt at knowing what lies beyond the limits of experience, but is primarily at any given time an attempt to discover what the people of that time believe about the world's general nature; such beliefs being the presuppositions of all their 'physics,' that is to say,[xx] their inquiries into its detail. Secondarily, it is the attempt to discover the corresponding presuppositions of other peoples and other times, and to follow the historical process by which one set of presuppositions has turned into another."

In other words, the central and highest philosophic discipline, metaphysics, is nothing but the understanding of our fundamental presupposition, seeing it together with other cultures' or other peoples' fundamental presuppositions, and the movement from one set of presuppositions to another. This is indeed a radical statement. Collingwood calls these presuppositions, to make it quite clear, the "absolute" presuppositions.

"The question of what presuppositions underlie the 'physics' or natural science of a certain people at a certain time is as purely historical a question as what kind of clothes they wear. [In other words, it is not in any peculiar sense philosophic.—LS] And this is the question that metaphysicians have to answer. It is not their business to raise the further question whether, among the various beliefs on this subject that various peoples hold and have held, this one or that one is true. [Whether, say, the Babylonian or Greek or Hebrew absolute presupposition is true or untrue.—LS] This question, when raised, would always be found, as it always has been found, unanswerable; and if there is anything in my 'logic of question and answer' that is not to be wondered at, for the beliefs whose history the metaphysician has to study are not answers to questions [which therefore can be criticized: are they correct answers to the question or not?—LS] but only presuppositions of questions, and therefore the distinction between what is true and what is false does not apply to them, but only the distinction between what is presupposed and what is not presupposed.[xxi] The beliefs which a metaphysician tries to study and codify are presuppositions of the questions asked by natural scientists, but are not answers to any questions at all. This might be expressed by calling them 'absolute' presuppositions."[xxii]

Now this is of course a crucial point. All human thought rests ultimately on absolute presuppositions, which differ from historical epoch to historical epoch, and regarding which the question of truth or untruth cannot be raised. This does not lead by itself to

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[xix] The words "after physics" and "by the side of, like parapsychology" are not in Collingwood.
[xx] "to say" is not in the original.
[xxi] Strauss omits the sentence "A presupposition of one question may be the answer to another question."
[xxii] Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 65–67.

relativism and nihilism—that is what Collingwood implies—because we cannot help believing in the absolute presuppositions of our society, and therefore, practically the question doesn't arise. But the great question is whether there are not grave crises in cultures or societies where the absolute presuppositions become questionable. And there, of course, there is no way out thinkable. Collingwood has no doubt that this state of affairs affects the possibility of historical objectivity regarding the absolute presuppositions. In other words, historical thought is also human thought, therefore dependent on absolute presuppositions differing from historical situation to historical situation. Therefore historical thought is open to the same difficulty that it cannot have objectivity proper. We look at the absolute presuppositions, say, of Plato or Hobbes, from the point of view of our absolute presuppositions. The only objective knowledge of a philosophic character is that of the series of absolute presuppositions which we discern in history. Of course, there cannot be an ethics or political theory proper, for they depend on questionable absolute presuppositions. Now let me pursue that.

From all I have said before, it follows that a rapprochement between philosophy and history is absolutely indispensable in Collingwood's view: a new kind of philosophy. A new kind of philosophy. Now what is that?

"Soon after the beginning of the seventeenth century,[xxiii] a number of intelligent people in Western Europe began to see in a settled and steady manner what a few here and there had seen by fits and starts for the last hundred years and more: namely that the problems which ever since the time of early Greek philosophy had gone by the collective name of 'physics' were capable of being restated in a shape in which, with the double weapon of experiment and mathematics, one could now solve them [whereas hitherto they had been insoluble—LS]. What was called Nature, they saw, had henceforth no secrets from man; only riddles which he had learned the trick of answering. Or, more accurately, Nature was no longer a Sphinx asking man riddles; it was man that did the asking, and Nature, now, that he put to the torture until she gave him the answer to his questions."[xxiv]

Now this grave change, this great progress made in the seventeenth century, is the model for that new, great change which Collingwood plans[14] to help to bring about. This statement about modern physics and the revolution of the seventeenth century clearly implies that the absolute presuppositions underlying modern physics are superior to the absolute presuppositions underlying Greek physics. And therefore this contradicts flatly the statement of the equality of the absolute presuppositions or, in other words, that the question of truth cannot arise regarding the absolute presuppositions. Now something analogous to what Bacon and Descartes and Galileo did regarding nature must now be done in regard to history. That is very urgent. Why? "It seemed almost as if man's power to control 'Nature' had been increasing *pari passu* with a decrease in his power to control human affairs."[xxv] In other words, the well-known fact: [15]the complete chaos, moral chaos, which has arisen in modern times, and Collingwood expects that the new

[xxiii] In Collingwood, "that century."
[xxiv] Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 77–78.
[xxv] Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 91.

philosophy, i.e., a philosophy which is radically historical, will solve this problem created by man's increasing his power through modern physics and technology.

The usual view is: Well, we only have to develop scientific psychology. They will take care of the problems caused by modern physics and chemistry by enabling us to manipulate men better, so that they behave more reasonably, and so on. Collingwood has very sensible things to say about this point. Psychology cannot do the job. He says it in very general but clear terms: psychology deals with the soul in contradistinction to the mind, and since the questions of true and untrue, good and bad, are questions for the mind, psychology is incompetent to deal with them. That is very abstractly stated, but I think fundamentally sound. But the question is whether history can do the job—an intelligent or philosophic history—which psychology admittedly cannot do.

"Was it possible that men should come to a better understanding of human affairs by studying history? Was history the thing which in future might play a part in civilized life analogous to that of natural science in the past? . . .
"The historian is a person whose questions are about the past. He is generally supposed to be a person whose questions are exclusively about the past; about a past, namely, that is dead and gone, and in no sense at all living on into the present."

This view Collingwood denies: "The past which an historian studies is not a dead past, but a past which in some sense is still living in the present." Therefore the historian alone can help us in understanding the present, the present having the past within itself. "So long as the past and the present are outside one another, knowledge of the past is not of much use in the problems of the present."

But the case is radically different from the other point of view. He gives this example:

"'Nothing here but trees and grass,' thinks the traveller, and marches on. 'Look,' says the woodsman [the trained man—LS], 'there is a tiger in that grass.' The historian's business is to reveal the less obvious features hidden from a careless eye in the present situation. What history can bring to moral and political life is a trained eye for the situation in which one has to act."

And therefore historical understanding is the only way in which we can get clarity about what we have to do. Acting well means acting according to the situation, especially to such situations where we do not have the help of *rules*, i.e., of universals: "If ready-made rules for dealing with situations of specific types are what you want, natural science is the kind of thing which can provide you with them." He gives here an example of where general rules are of no help.

"Everyone has certain rules according to which he acts in dealing with his tailor. These rules are, we will grant, soundly based on genuine experience; and by acting on them a man will deal fairly with his tailor and helps his tailor to deal fairly by him. But so far as he acts according to these rules, he is dealing with his tailor only in his capacity as a tailor, and not as John Robinson, aged sixty, with a weak heart and a consumptive

daughter, a passion for gardening and an overdraft at the bank. The rules for dealing with tailors no doubt enable you to cope with the tailor in John Robinson, but they prevent you from getting to grips with whatever else there may be in him. Of course, if you know that he has a weak heart, you will manage your dealings with him by modifying the rules for tailor-situations in the light of the rules for situations involving people with weak hearts. But at this rate the modifications soon become so complicated that the rules are no longer of any practical use to you. We have got beyond the stage at which rules can guide action, and you go back to improvising, as best you can, a method of handling the situation in which you find yourself."[xxvi]

Now this is a key example, and therefore we have to look at it for one moment. Is it true that only knowledge of the situation—replace the tailor by a complicated political situation—that knowledge of the situation as such, without any universals, can guide us? It may be true that all the rules are insufficient—Mr. Levy?

Mr. Levy: The example, I guess, would be Montgomery as a general, or even maybe Churchill as a leader. Did Montgomery have to know anything about Aristotle to win the battle of El Alamein? And yet he had great practical wisdom, as shown by his memoir and his victory in that battle. And did Churchill have to know anything about Aristotle, which he seemed not to know very much about except for the *Ethics*?

LS: Yes, well, that is an entirely different question, whether "rules" means "rules to be found in this or that book."

Mr. Levy: I was just using that as an example of a rule, of rules, *any* rules besides that of practical experience as a—

LS: Yes. Well, there was one thing, I believe, which was quite clear in the case of Montgomery apart from the situation, although it constituted the situation, namely, that he had to win it: victory. Yes? Now in the case of politics as distinguished from generalship, the end is somewhat more complicated, complex—you know, because the political good consists of a number of ingredients which cannot be reduced to the simple formula, *victory*, and therefore there are all kinds of considerations. Which of these ingredients is at the moment the most important or the most urgent? This is another point.

But if you look at this case of the tailor John Robinson, it is perfectly clear that it is a matter, first of all, of dealing fairly by him and he should deal fairly by you, that universal fairness is essential for acting properly. And secondly, here [16]human kindness, which is not the same as fairness, [is not the rule, but modifies it]. [17]In other words, every situation demands of us that it be developed in one or the other direction. The question of the direction in which it should be developed is ultimately a question of universals, not necessarily universal *rules*, without which we could not act. And this question is simply lost in the historicism of Collingwood as well as in others. For Collingwood, as he makes clear—[18][I'll] give you one example: the question of what is the *summum bonum*, the highest good, is for him simply a pseudo-question, just as the question of what is

[xxvi] Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 95, 96, 97, 100, 101, 104–5.

knowledge, or what is art, because all questions must be understood situationally. I must say that in this respect the ordinary positivistic social scientists, with their emphasis on the value questions, are preferable, in my opinion, to Collingwood. I mean, what speaks against them I have tried to state, but in Collingwood the question of the ends in their universality simply disappears in the concern for the situation in which you act. The question of the good life cannot be simply replaced by the question of "What shall I do here?," although the question of the good life becomes sterile if it is not specified by me in this situation, in accord[ance] with that situation. But perhaps Collingwood would say that the question of the good is a pseudo-question because it is already answered by the absolute presuppositions of the society to which we belong, and therefore it cannot arise. But there we come up against a great question: What if the culture or society to which we belong is in a state of crisis, and we lose our[19] morals? This is not in any way faced by Collingwood. He ends the book with a discussion of the political situation at the time of the Spanish Civil War, in which he takes a rather simplistic view of the situation: he takes it for granted that Neville Chamberlain was a crypto-fascist, and other things, which means[20] the situation alone is a poor and insufficient guide for taking one's bearings, both in private and in public matters.

So I will leave it at these points, and . . .[xxvii] . . . mean the understanding of the human product, thought and so on, of the past. That is the common meaning, and[21] this can be practiced on the basis of various philosophic assumptions. Historicism[22] is something much more specific. Historicism is the assertion that all human thought rests ultimately on presuppositions which differ from epoch to epoch, and which are not susceptible of any criticism.

Student: I see. Then Collingwood was concerned with both of these two things.

LS: Yes, Collingwood became entangled in this difficulty: that while he has to assert the equality of all absolute presuppositions, he cannot help asserting the supremacy of that absolute presupposition which goes together with historicism. In other words, all other cultures or historical periods depended on such absolute presuppositions, but *his* situation, the situation of his thought, goes together with an awareness of this fact. This is a radical change in the situation. That is the difficulty which exists from the very beginning. Mr. Shulsky?

Mr. Shulsky: Is it true, though, that his awareness of the historicity of thought is in fact a big change, especially when it comes to the actual writing of history? Because it would seem that even if a modern historian is aware of historicism, he is just as culture-bound, so to speak, in writing history as anyone else was, so that this progress is so to speak external to the actual writing of history, or understanding history—

LS: That may be so, but still—I mean, let us assume that the historian is not affected by that, although it would be strange if the historicist insight, if it is an insight, did not have an effect on the writing of history. The key point is the philosophic question: Must not historicism be applied to itself? That is to say, historicism too is historical, that is to say,

[xxvii] There was a break in the tape at this point. The recording resumes in mid-sentence.

[it] belongs to a specific historical situation. Is it not necessary? That is of course not in itself fatal if it is properly thought through, provided the thinker in question implies that the situation to which the historicist insight belongs is a privileged moment, let us say the absolute moment, the moment in which man becomes aware for the first time of *the* fundamental basis of all human thought and action. And of course he would have to make this intelligible; the mere assertion would not mean anything. He must show how come[23] this foundation of all foundations, which men never saw as such before, became visible in the twentieth century. What is the peculiarity of the twentieth century that it became visible here and now? That he must answer. Yes, Mr. Devereaux?

Mr. Devereaux: As far as I understand, you agreed with Collingwood in saying that it was necessary today that there be a rapprochement between history and philosophy. Do you mean that in contrast to the premoderns, we simply have more obstacles to overcome? Or did you mean something else, more than that?

LS: Well, I meant it in the first place as a strictly empirical assertion in the old sense of the word, where an empirical assertion means I know that it is so, and I do not know the reason. What they call a "hard fact." A hard fact is a fact where you do not know the reason, because if you know the reason, it is no longer so hard, ya? [Laughter] That is so that whenever I read something, an analysis of some of the fundamental concepts with which political scientists are concerned—of course the mere historical knowledge which is thoughtless and undigested is of no value, I am speaking only of the other way around—but if someone does not go into the genesis of these concepts, then he is simply a superficial analyst. One can state it formally and therefore simply as follows. As men of science, we are all concerned with knowledge about the things of which we have primarily only opinions, and if we want to proceed in a perfectly above-board and clean manner, we must first make clear to ourselves what our opinions are. We must clarify our opinions. Now if we begin to do that, we see very soon that our opinions are[24] [in] very large part opinions which we share with our contemporaries and, even more, inherited opinions. But think of such a thing like political freedom:[25] while there are some features, perhaps, which have emerged in the last generation,[26] fundamentally that is an inheritance. Now if we want to clarify our opinion, we must therefore also go into this whole history of "quote political liberty." So the strictly philosophic concern with clarifying our opinions changes necessarily and even insensibly into historical study. This is, I think, an empirical fact which every one of us who is doing some thought, [some] reflection about it, simply experiences.

Now when we look, say, at Aristotle, and we see[27] [that] in order to clarify his opinion he does not engage in any kind of historical studies (and disregarding all differences of rank between people like ourselves and Aristotle entirely, because even the greatest men now living would have to engage[28] in historical studies, whereas Aristotle did not), then the first impression one gets, and this is supported by powerful prejudice, [is] that Aristotle, however great he was, lacked the awareness of a certain dimension, of the historical dimension, and which awareness is the preserve of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, somehow prepared by people like Vico—and you know the usual litany you get. Then that is a question or should be a question, at least: Is this interpretation correct? Is the

acquisition of that sixth sense, the historical sense, [an] enrichment of man's understanding or a corrective to peculiar defects of modern thought? That is the question. And I think however we will answer it, we are wiser if we have raised that question and not simply accepted the view now prevailing, because when we accept the view now prevailing, we simply accept the prejudice. Now a prejudice may be true, but if I realize that it is true, it is no longer a prejudice. Accepting prejudice[29] as such [is] a questionable thing, for academic people, at least. Yes?

Mr. Devereaux: [30]You say that in order to investigate our opinions, we must go into[31] the origins and so on. Does one ever get to the end of this, or are you constantly in this historical investigation?

LS: Well, that is a very difficult question. We must never lose a certain common sense. In other words, for a given purpose it may be perfectly sufficient to stop at a certain point, and it may be relatively easy, but other questions are very . . . I could tell you some stories from my private experience where I was sure I had clarified something, a concept which I thought was relatively important, and then I found that further studies are still indicated. But it all depends what the immediate purpose of the study is, if one is . . . That is exactly the point with which we are confronted when we advise students regarding doctor's theses. Let us assume that the subject is of interest, and then the question arises: Is it manageable? Now what is true of students is true in a modified manner also of professors and even of old professors, who are supposed to be able to manage problems which a doctoral candidate cannot manage, but even they, and precisely they, will also come across questions which cannot be managed, and therefore they have to find some defensible and not arbitrary division of the subject matter so that they can do that. Whether a full clarification is in fact possible, that is a very long question. And to the extent to which historicism means only this, that a full clarification is not possible, to that extent it has a point. But the question is whether one has to be a historicist in order to admit the infinity and the elusiveness of the truth.[32] Do you see how this is implied? Yes?

Student: If I understood what you said about Collingwood correctly, he would say that you can't say whether Plato or Hobbes, for example, which one of these was right, because each one asked an essentially different question. Then you said, in contradistinction, that you can still ask which question is higher or more worthy. But wouldn't Collingwood say this doesn't make any sense, because the worth of a particular question is only relative to the particular age in which it was asked?

LS: Yes, but then Collingwood goes on to say that there is something more fundamental than all questions,[33] what he calls the absolute presuppositions, on the basis of which questions arise. And he says, [regarding] these absolute presuppositions,[34] you cannot say whether the absolute presupposition of Plato or that of Hobbes is true or not. It seems simple enough. But then he discusses the question of modern physics, seventeenth century and so on, which is based on specific absolute presuppositions. But here we see the very strange fact: that modern science represents a progress beyond earlier science insofar as it can solve all kinds of questions which were insoluble in the past. Or nearer home: the most fundamental insight possible on the basis of Collingwood is the insight

into the historical character of all thought, the insight that all human thought is based on absolute presuppositions. I would say this is the absolute presupposition of absolute presuppositions. The absolute presuppositions of the first order cannot be said to be true or false, according to Collingwood: the absolute presupposition of absolute presuppositions is *true*. I mean, what do you care about the absolute presuppositions of the first order if you have a much more fundamental insight of which you can be sure that it is true? Do you see the point? I think the position as Collingwood stated it is not tenable. It was developed much more subtly and profoundly on the basis of Nietzsche by Heidegger (the talk of which I spoke last time), and here the difficulties also appear in a peculiar way.

Well, I would like to mention only one point. Fundamentally,[35] what Collingwood says about absolute presuppositions would be accepted by Heidegger.[36] Heidegger only states it differently, and Heidegger is much more concerned with the phenomenon of the connection between thought and language. Language is of course always the language of this or that people, with this and that peculiar tradition. Therefore when we think traditionally of truth, we mean the universality of truth, say, today in mathematics: this is a universal language. But philosophy as philosophy can of course never take on this mathematical character. It is always linked to a specific language, whether it is German or Greek or English, and so on and so on: necessarily particular. Now today, [37]men, all inhabitants of this globe, are [for the first time] brought into contact with one another, and the question of the universalism of thought, which always concerned the philosophers and [the] scientists, has now become a grave practical problem.[38] I would like to state it as simply as possible, since it is a very complex thing. In brief,[39] Heidegger links up the historicist insight with an insight into the essential defect of all previous philosophy, of all philosophy of Greek origin. There was something fundamentally narrow about the traditional view which implied that history is philosophically irrelevant. Now this enlargement is somehow connected in Heidegger's view with the need today to start an intellectual meeting with the Far East. I mean not Mao, but with the Chinese tradition.[xxviii] And of course not with those people who run around in America and say [that] what Confucius said is what Thomas Jefferson said—not these but the people who really understand the tradition and know that this is nonsense.

Now that a dialogue between Westerners of great depth and thoughtfulness with Easterners of the same character could contribute to enlarge, to free the West from its peculiar defects—on a very low level, that is suggested by Northrop, of whom many of you—but there is no comparison between the two, I must emphasize that.[xxix] And now here is the interesting point. You could say [that] then you reach here at the end a truly universal understanding, where Westerners and Easterners see the same thing in the same manner. But here is the point: the difference in the dialogue between the Westerner and the Easterner—there is an understanding, they understand each other, but in a way they

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[xxviii] Heidegger begins such a dialogue in "A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer," in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 1–54. Published in German as *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959).

[xxix] F.S.C. Northrop (1893–1992), American philosopher, author of *The Meeting of East and West* (New York: Macmillan, 1946).

remain of course the same. Each is enlarged: the Westerner is enlarged by the Easterner, the Easterner is enlarged by the Westerner, but the starting point, that the one is a Westerner, the[40] [other] is an Easterner, remains. In other words, the universal regarding which they agree still looks different from the two different points of view. Do you see that? That is, I think, the most extreme attempt of which I am aware of trying to reconcile historicism with this universalism, without which human thought is not possible.

Student: It is true that Hobbes's state and Plato's state would not be the same thing, yet it seems as though they had contradictory notions not only of what the state was, but what people were, what human nature is? And those surely—human nature was not fundamentally different necessarily, but their understanding was.

LS: Yes, but that's the point.

Same Student: How would Collingwood get around that or explain that problem? I mean, is man fundamentally—does he seek his own self-preservation?

LS: No, no. That is much too superficial from Collingwood's point of view. Man is a being which is essentially historical. Man has always, as he puts it, a determinate nature. You don't find man nude, so to speak, man without having interpreted himself and the world. Proof: language. On every stage which we find, man has a language, and this language means a complete interpretation, on whichever level, of human life and the whole. Behind that you cannot go.[41] You cannot speak of human nature, the naked human nature, so to speak; you can never find it. That is radically inaccessible, [and] therefore all general science of man, like biology or psychology, would remain below the level of this whole problem, because the argument would be that biology and psychology always rest themselves on premises which they cannot substantiate and which are somehow dependent on what Collingwood calls the absolute presuppositions regarding which the question of truth and untruth cannot be raised. Yes, Mr. . . ?

Student: As I understand Heidegger's attempt, that would seem to me to be only of practical, in other words, not philosophical relevance, unless you conceive of that reconciliation, enlargement, between East and West as the absolute moment that that becomes the whole, what has been missing in the tradition.

LS: No, it is of course of theoretical importance, because the Westerners learn something which they do not know from their own tradition, just as the Easterners learn something in their dialogue which they do not know from their tradition. And the [sentences], so to say,[42] which Heidegger has devoted to this subject go easily on a single page. He only alludes to that, but I believe that is very important for the horizon in which he thinks. The key point is: under no conditions a return to past ways of thinking; that's reactionary.[43] That is so in Heidegger, as well as in people much lower than he is.[44] In former times, [sometimes] people had the view (it was very common in the West) [that] there is a Greek way of thinking, which is deficient and must be supplemented by the biblical way of thinking, which is also in a way "East," Palestine being situated in Asia. But this is out, for Heidegger. In this respect he simply follows Nietzsche: Christianity is not

acceptable to him in any way. And he seeks for this supplement to the West not even in India, but in the Far East. No reasonings, only allusions to these things are given, but I think what interested me only was[45] this peculiar universalism. I mean, on the level of positivism, universalism is no problem. Proof: Chinese who are biologists, mathematicians, and so on, as any Westerner. Truth, science, is essentially universal. But this becomes a problem when one reflects about the fact that modern science, while being accessible to every human being of certain gifts, is of Western origin and somehow dependent on absolute presuppositions of Western origin. I mean the thing which people bring out about Parisian nominalism and other things as the basis of modern science, [and] there are lots of things,[46] rightly or wrongly,[xxx] and therefore this will not do. Or this understanding of engineers all over the globe, this doesn't go to the fundamental human questions.[47] Nor is it possible, according to this kind of people, that there is a universal morality, because if you look at the moralities, in a crude way they might agree—you have to behave decently and [in a] more or less gentlemanly [manner], and so they agree on the whole—but when you come to more subtle questions, more detailed questions, you get a great variety of answers. And this leads first to the doubt of any possible universal morality, and yet ultimately the need, not only the practical but in the first place the theoretical need, of universalism asserts itself. Very simply, the historicist thesis is a universal thesis. No one can run away from that. Colloquially, one says we cannot run away from reason, and the simple proof of this is that in the end we cannot run away from making[48] universal assertions. And even if we supply them with some question marks and so on, that doesn't affect the fundamental [situation]. Good.

Now I will leave it at that and would like to say how I intend to go on. After having considered positivism and historicism, the two prevailing ways of thinking in the West today, and furthermore the fact that both are incompatible with political philosophy, with the idea of political philosophy, I have to raise the question whether there is not some common ground between political philosophy and the views now prevailing. And the answer is: There is one. It is the history of political philosophy. This is not denied by any serious man, that the history of political philosophy is possible and necessary, however impossible political philosophy itself may be. And we will start on this basis, on an irenic basis, and forget about . . .

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[1] Deleted "The second point of view"
[2] Deleted "it."
[3] Deleted "in the form."
[4] Deleted "see."
[5] Deleted "might, or their."
[6] Deleted "that."
[7] Deleted "remains."
[8] Deleted "is not."
[9] Deleted "Now."
[10] Deleted "We find."
[11] Deleted "is"
[12] Deleted "they"
[13] Deleted "Well, I do not—it is not necessary, I think to…"

[xxx] Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), has recently made a version of this argument.

[14] Deleted “to help.”
[15] Deleted “of”
[16] Deleted “what modifies the rule”
[17] Deleted “That also comes in.”
[18] Deleted “to”
[19] Deleted “moorings.”
[20] Deleted “he has.”
[21] Deleted “why should this.”
[22] Deleted “no.”
[23] Deleted “that.”
[24] Deleted “only to a very small part, say, my opinions, are to a.”
[25] Deleted “How much of it.”
[26] Deleted “but.”
[27] Deleted “he does not engage in such.”
[28] Deleted “in it.”
[29] Moved “is.”
[30] Deleted “Does one…must one continue…”
[31] Deleted “to.”
[32] Deleted “I mean, this is.”
[33] Deleted “yes?”
[34] Deleted “regarding them.” Moved “regarding.”
[35] Deleted “this.”
[36] Deleted “But there is—.”
[37] Deleted “we are for the first time.” Moved “for the first time.”
[38] Deleted “Now therefore.”
[39] Deleted “what Heidegger is trying to.”
[40] Deleted “one.”
[41] Deleted “you know?”
[42] Deleted “the;” moved “sentences.”
[43] Deleted “you know?”
[44] Deleted “And he sees this.”
[45] Deleted “this.”
[46] Deleted “which a certain”
[47] Deleted “And here the suggestion comes in that you can.”
[48] Deleted “in the end.”

Session 8: February 1, 1965

On the Difference between the Ancients and the Moderns

Leo Strauss: At the beginning of this course I said I would try to make visible to you the air which we all breathe whether we know it or not, and I believe I did that by presenting to you the issue of positivism on the one hand, and historicism on the other. This was necessary because political philosophy as the quest for *the* just or *the* good society has become incredible in our age owing to positivism and historicism. I cannot repeat, naturally, what I said in these seven long sessions. Positivism leads to the contempt or neglect of the political philosophies of the past. Historicism, on the other hand, must cultivate the history of political philosophy, although it can no longer recognize the possibility of political philosophy proper.

Yet closer inspection shows that even positivism cannot leave it at that contempt if it wants to fulfill its self-imposed duty. For the study of human societies, political societies, cannot limit itself to the study of institutions, etc. It must also take into consideration the ideologies, and within this context it is compelled to discuss the political philosophies of the past. To take a simple example, which I believe I have used before: in order to understand the United States Constitution as it is now, one must of course understand it as it was understood by its framers, the original framers. And if one tries to do that, one is driven back in the first place to Montesquieu, the theoretical authority for Hamilton and Madison, and Montesquieu himself does not reveal his full message if we do not contrast his teaching with that of certain ancient thinkers, among them the historian Polybius. More generally stated, every attempt at rational knowledge, philosophic or scientific, consists in replacing opinions by knowledge. This cannot be conscientiously done if one does not first know the opinions from which one starts. But these opinions are only partly our opinions. Their most important part, or their largest part at least, is inherited. What we regard as our opinions consists to a considerable extent of the sediments of past discussions, discussions which were conscious, which were the focus of attention in earlier centuries, and now we live on their results; hence the nonhistorical concern with the clarification of our opinions insensibly shifts into historical studies. And to that extent, historicism is right in the assertion that philosophic or scientific questions cannot be separated from the historical questions, or that a fusion of philosophy and history is indispensable.

Historicism is superior to positivism, owing to this awareness. In fairness to the founder of positivism, Comte, one must say that Comte was perfectly clear on this point. According to Comte, one cannot make clear what the scientific spirit is except by means of a history of the human mind. One must see the earlier alternatives, [1]the theological and the metaphysical mind, if one wants to see the scientific mind in its peculiarity and the superiority of the scientific spirit to the spirit of theology and metaphysics. There is an external sign of the fact that this need for historical studies is felt more and more within science. I have not made any statistical studies, but from some facts which have come to

my attention it seems that the interest in the history of science, i.e., of modern science, is now much greater than it was, say, fifty years ago. That a physicist of the rank of Einstein took the trouble of writing a history of physics is, I think, one of these straws in the wind.

Now regarding historicism, we have seen [that] according to it the fundamental fact is a change in the absolute presuppositions. To use the term coined by Collingwood, we can say it's a change in the categories. Change cannot be explained; that is the reason why it is a fundamental fact. For any explanation means the use of categories, of specific categories, and the validity of these categories is exactly the problem on the basis of historicism. You remember[2] what I quoted to you from Nagel about the logically arbitrary and historically contingent character of the principle of causality as understood by modern science. Marxism, for instance, believes it is able to explain the change of categories, of the principles of understanding and action, by tracing them to the relations of production, ultimately. But the question is whether the assumption of the primacy, of the fundamental character, of the relations of production is not itself historically relative, i.e., plausible under the conditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but not simply true. The difficulty regarding historicism is this: that despite the fact that the change of absolute presuppositions is not a rational process, a progress from lesser to greater rationality, yet *our* absolute presuppositions, which include and which consist in the historical awareness, are of course said to be superior to all earlier thought. Now that superiority is identical with the discovery of the historical character of all human thought, or, as people say, with the experience of history as history, or of historicity. This experience, whatever that may mean, is based somehow on historical evidence, and here we see again the fusion of philosophy and history. Historicism cannot clarify itself except through clarifying the position which it replaces—the nonhistoricist philosophy.

At any rate, there exists agreement today as to the necessity of the history of political philosophy, on the basis of the belief in the impossibility of political philosophy proper. In order to be reasonable, moderate, not extremist, or however you would like to call it, it is safest to begin therefore with the history of political philosophy, a subject the legitimacy of which is not denied by anyone today except by people who are very obviously lacking in simple coherence of thought. But still there will be one difference between the way we—"we" is not *pluralis maiestatis*, but I mean "I and some people who think like me"—we, in contradistinction to the positivists and historicists, approach the history of philosophy while we are open to the possibility that political philosophy as such is not impossible. And so I believe that this approach is less prejudiced, more open-minded than the positivist and the historicist approaches.

Now let us proceed in an orderly manner. We[3] turn to the history of political philosophy, to the *whole* history of political philosophy, in principle at least. The first thing you have to do in such an enterprise is to divide it into periods; otherwise, how can we find our bearings in this infinite mass of material? The initial division into periods must not be arbitrary. How can we make it nonarbitrary? I would suggest: if we do not rely on our own poor judgment but follow the views, the consciousness, of the actors—in this case, of the great political philosophers. Now if we turn to them, we learn, as good children

[do, that] we have first to be docile and to listen to our betters, and later on we of course may also criticize them.

Now[4] we learn from Cicero that the founder of political philosophy was Socrates. Socrates was the one, according to Cicero, who brought[5] philosophy [down] from heaven, brought it down to earth and introduced it into the cities and houses of men, and compelled it to think about good and bad and so on.[i] So the whole story of political philosophy seems to begin with Socrates. But here we are in an embarrassing situation, because Socrates did not write. The only things which he did write, as far as our knowledge goes, were two letters. When he held a discussion about justice and injustice, he drew up a list for the discussion, and wrote out, in Greek letters of course [LS writes on the blackboard], justice and injustice. Then he asked the interlocutor to enumerate the points. But at any rate, Socrates did not write books, so the oldest books available are those by Plato, Socrates's direct pupil, and by Aristotle, Plato's pupil. After Aristotle's time, almost within his lifetime, a new school emerged, because Plato founded a school, the Academy, whereas Aristotle founded a school called the Lyceum. And the third, later school is the so-called Stoic school. Here we know nothing: we have only fragments, and we have to rely chiefly on Cicero, who gives us coherent presentations, if very summary presentations, of the Stoic moral-political doctrine.

Now all these developments from Socrates to the Stoics, this I propose to call classical political philosophy. By this I do not wish to minimize the differences between Plato, [6]Aristotle, and the Stoics, but they have something fundamentally in common: they all build on a foundation laid by Socrates. This classical political philosophy is the only political philosophy prior to the modern age. As for medieval political philosophy, we must distinguish within it between political theology, a political teaching based on revelation (which as such does not fall within the province of political philosophy), and political philosophy proper. Now the political philosophy proper of the Middle Ages is fundamentally based on classical political philosophy, especially Aristotle. One of the boldest medieval thinkers—Dante, in his *Monarchy*—speaks of the absolute novelty of his enterprise in that work.[7] [Yet] one has only to begin to read it[8] [to] see that it is based on Aristotle. Aristotle is *the* philosopher for Dante. And however original the proposal made in the *Monarchy* may be, the foundations are Aristotelian.

At a certain moment a break occurred. Again, we do not trust our own impression but look around and listen to these voices of the men of the past,[9] who claimed to have done away completely with this political philosophy founded by Socrates, root and branch. And the loudest and clearest voice—there cannot be the slightest doubt about that—is that of Thomas Hobbes, and so until further notice we will assume that *the* break with classical political philosophy occurred in the work of Hobbes. And as I will already say now, closer study would show that the break had occurred prior to Hobbes, in the work of Machiavelli, but in Machiavelli the claim to a radical break is by far not as audible and powerful as in Hobbes. So we have then this very simple division from which we start: classical political philosophy or premodern political philosophy, and modern political philosophy. And the question which concerns us, since we are not merely historians, we

[i] Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes*, book 4.

cannot afford to be merely historians, this question is for us a quarrel: Which of the two is right? And this is a quarrel of the ancients and the moderns: *la querelle des anciens et des modernes*, as it was called in the seventeenth century. At that time the famous quarrel was the quarrel about whether, say, Dryden or Corneille were as good dramatists as Sophocles and Euripides, or Molière as good a comedian as Aristophanes. In other words, it appears to be primarily a literary question, but it is much more than that. The fundamental quarrel was that between modern philosophy, which includes modern natural science, and classical philosophy and classical science. The most famous document in the English language of that quarrel is Swift's *Battle of the Books*, and for those who read things more carefully, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. But this I cannot go into now.

Now Hobbes questions all preceding political philosophy. They all were wrong, and worse than wrong: sophists. In the present-day textbook version, which is of course not entirely unreasonable (it is very hard to say something which is entirely unreasonable) but nevertheless it is misleading: there was another tradition stemming from the sophists, via the Epicureans and so on. This thing didn't exist for Hobbes: that was not political philosophy; that was a teaching which destroyed civil society and not one which tried to show a way toward the good or just civil society, let alone was political philosophy in Hobbes's sense. Now Hobbes gives a long list in various places of these men, and Socrates, Plato,[10] Aristotle, and Cicero are of course the greatest names. He doesn't say anything about the Scholastics, because he wrote in a Protestant country, and you can say the Reformation had taken away this problem from Hobbes, although that's not quite true because Richard Hooker was also an Anglican, and he made a great use of Thomas Aquinas. And he[ii] has a discussion of Cardinal Bellarmine, but in a very special context, the context of ecclesiastical power, where he has to take issue with the claim of the Catholic Church as stated by Bellarmine, that all ecclesiastical power is concentrated in the hands of the pope.

Now what is wrong with these people: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and so on? Hobbes says they are teachers of anarchy, anarchists—a very strange assertion, it seems, Aristotle as anarchist. What does Hobbes mean by that? They laid the foundation for criticizing their governments. From the point of view of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and Cicero, and so on, it is legitimate to criticize the governments if they misbehave, which does not necessarily mean that they justify rebellion, but they made it possible, theoretically, to criticize the government. Think only of the concept of tyrant, [and] you have it very clear. In other words, they laid the foundation for an appeal from the law laid down by government, the positive law, to *natural law*. That is historically correct. But Hobbes says, opposing them, that the command of natural law is to obey the positive law; therefore there is no possibility of appealing from the positive law to the natural law. And in the particular form which Hobbes gave this thought, it means (and this is in a way implied in what I said): government must be absolute, in order to be government. And an absolute government is as such uncriticizable. Now this criticism of Hobbes's is crude criticism, but not groundless criticism, hence an important implication:[11] that Hobbes to a considerable extent agrees with the tradition which he attacks, namely,[12] [like] the

[ii] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 42.

tradition, he recognizes natural law. For how could he otherwise say *the* command of natural law is to obey the positive law? So the difference between Hobbes and the tradition comes first to sight as a difference within the context of natural law. Now what is that difference? In the epistle dedicatory of his *Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, Hobbes says: "From the two principal parts of our nature, reason and passion, have proceeded two kinds of learning, mathematical and dogmatical." It is obvious that mathematics comes from reason and dogmatical from passion.

"The former is free from controversies and dispute, because it consists in comparing figures and motion only, in which things truth and the interests of men, oppose not each other. But in the later, in dogmatical learning,[iii] there is nothing not disputable, because it compares men and meddles with their right and profit: in which, as oft as reason is against the man,[iv] so oft will a man be against reason. And from hence it cometh that they that have written of justice and policy in general, i.e., the political philosophers,[v] do all invade each other and themselves with contradiction. [In other words, there doesn't exist any political philosophy worthy of the name.—LS] To reduce this doctrine to the rules and infallibility of reason, there is no way but first to put such principles down for a foundation as passion, not mistrusting, may not seek to displace; and afterward, to build thereon the truth of cases in the law of nature, which hitherto have been built in the air, by degrees, till the whole be inexpugnable."[vi]

So what is the difference? Traditional doctrine, political philosophy, was under the spell of passion [and] therefore not rational. As they say today, it was ideological. But there was nevertheless a reason which is slightly different: the foundations were wrongly laid because the principles laid down by Socrates and his successors were distrusted by passion. And Hobbes wants to reform, to revolutionize, natural law doctrine, and thus make it a scientific doctrine for the first time by laying down foundations which are agreeable to passion, in harmony with passion. Natural law must be in harmony with the passions, not against them. That is the first, of course very insufficient, statement. Hobbes will be compelled to make a distinction between passions with which one must be in harmony and passions which must be fought; that is the second step. But the first point is [that] the foundation must be a passion. This is the first point I would like just to read to you.

Now let me read to you another statement in the same work, *Elements of Law*, part 2, chapter 9, heading of section 8, where he speaks of the duties of government. "The institution of youth in true morality and politics necessary for keeping the subjects in peace."

The subjects must be taught true morality. That is very traditional. But these *Elements of Law*, from which I quoted, are Hobbes's earliest work, which on the whole is the most traditional version. Let us see how he speaks in a later work, *Of the Citizen*, how he calls

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[iii] "In dogmatical learning" is a restatement, not in Hobbes.
[iv] In original, "a man."
[v] "I.e., the political philosophers" is a clarification, not in Hobbes.
[vi] *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (London: Frank Cass, 1889).

it there. In *Of the Citizen*, chapter 13, section 9, the heading: "The correct institution of the citizens[vii] in political doctrine is necessary for the preservation of peace." Here he does not speak any more of true morality. Shortly after him a very great political thinker, of whom you will all have heard, John Locke, said: "However strange it may seem, the lawmaker hath nothing to do with moral virtues and vices," but only with security of life and limb and property.[viii] Now this is clearly implied already in Hobbes, and even stated to some extent: the government is concerned with nothing but the preservation of peace. Accordingly, moral virtue in Hobbes's sense is nothing but the human habits conducive to peace: peaceableness and all its implications. Virtues which have no direct relation to peace, such as courage, intelligence, wisdom, even temperance, are not strictly speaking moral virtues from Hobbes's point of view. Now if we take these two points I mentioned together, building on the passions [and] narrowing down the sphere of moral virtue so that moral virtue is nothing but the habits conducive to peace, we can say that what Hobbes achieved and wished to achieve was a lowering of the standards set up by Socrates and his successors. Of course, he believed that the older standards were foolish, but still, that is exactly part of the quarrel: Were they foolish?[13] At first glance, we see that the standards are much lower, much more pedestrian. Winston Churchill somewhere speaks of "low but solid grounds." This is a clear formulation of what was in the minds of men such as Hobbes and Locke, though Churchill didn't mean this. "Low but solid" versus high but unsolid—building in the air, as Hobbes said.

This is a crucial part of the fundamental layer of modern political philosophy. Now why is it necessary to lower the standards, as I called it? Let us consider a few remarks of Hobbes. In *The Citizen*, chapter 1, section 2: "Of those which have written something about states, the majority presuppose or assume or postulate, that man is an animal born apt to society. The Greeks say *zōon politikon*, the political animal, and build on that foundation the civic doctrine . . ." and so on.[ix] And Hobbes tries to show that this is absurd, that man is by nature not apt for peace and peaceable living together, but rather the opposite. And he concludes this paragraph with the remark: "the origin of great and lasting societies cannot be sought in men's dutiful benevolence or friendliness," as Cicero for example said, "but only in mutual fear."[x] Man is by nature antisocial, which Hobbes identifies with asocial. As he puts it, nature dissociates man. And the fundamental error of the tradition was that it believed that nature made men by nature social. Nature is not a kind mother but a stepmother, even an enemy. This is quite obvious when you think of Hobbes's famous doctrine of the state of nature. Everyone has heard these beautiful four adjectives: the state of nature is characterized by the fact that man's life is solitary, nasty,

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[vii] "A right instruction of the citizens" is the expression used in *De Cive or The Citizen*, ed. Sterling P. Lamprecht (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), xii, an edition based on Hobbes's own translation with spelling modernized. Strauss is probably translating from the Latin edition of *De Cive* (Amsterdam: Elzevir Press, 1647) from which he quotes in *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 285–86.

[viii] Locke, *An Essay concerning Toleration* (1667), in *John Locke: Political Writings*, ed. D. Wootton (New York: Mentor, 1993), at 194–95.

[ix] *De Cive*, chapter 1, section 2.

[x] *De Cive*, chapter 1, section 2.

brutish, and short. This is the condition in which nature has placed us. All blessings of life we owe to action against nature, human action against nature.

Now another point connected with that is the following one, which Hobbes states most clearly in *The Citizen*, chapter 2, paragraph 1.[14] [There] he speaks about how the authors define the law of nature, and he says most people assume that the law of nature is identical with the common opinion of mankind, or at least of the wisest and most civilized nations. In other words, there is a natural understanding, a natural awareness of the principles of right and wrong, and this shows itself even in savage nations to some degree. Hobbes simply rejects this: no trust whatever in common opinion, in the common sayings of the human race. And here we must remind ourselves that Hobbes was a contemporary of and in a way a competitor with Descartes. Now Descartes began, laid the foundation for, the enterprise of modern philosophy with his famous universal doubt, his doubt of everything. Hobbes absolutely agrees with this point of Descartes, that one must begin with universal doubt: he even says, in a somewhat unfriendly, nonmagnanimous manner, that this is elementary, everyone knows that. But what is the meaning of that? There have been doubters all the time. They were called skeptics. The difference between Descartes and the skeptics is this. The skeptics drew the inference that human knowledge is not possible, and we have to live with these probabilities, with these guesses, as Mr. Popper seems to say now. But Descartes was the opposite of a skeptic. He believed that if we want to have a solid foundation for science or philosophy, we must build on a foundation which is not exposed to any possible doubt, so that the extreme skepticism is the foundation for an absolutely watertight dogmatism. In this point Hobbes is in fundamental agreement with Descartes.

Now among the arguments which Descartes uses in order to justify the universal doubt, the following is most revealing. He says there might be a very powerful evil genius who wishes to deceive us. Now this might be the situation of our intellect, the situation of man, and therefore we must think as if this were the case in order to be free even from the power of such a very powerful evil demon. And when someone says, “There is no such evil demon, that is nonsense,” Descartes says that doesn’t make any difference, because if you speak of natural causes (natural causes in the sense in which we now speak of it) of our perceptions and conceptions, they are as little concerned with our realizing the truth as this evil demon would be. No trust in our natural faculties: we have to find a new foundation. In some respect, Hobbes is even clearer here than Descartes. But the point which I wanted to make is that the lowering of the standards has to do with a profoundly changed posture toward nature: no trust in nature. Now if we want to understand Hobbes somewhat better, we have to consider an earlier thinker, to whom I have already referred, who stated the crucial point before Hobbes. As far as I remember, Hobbes never mentions him, and this is in itself quite interesting. You know, today it is customary that you quote or mention names, but in the past this was, in some writers at least, a very great art: whom to mention, whom to honor by mentioning, and whom not to mention. The man I mean is Machiavelli. And here *the* fundamental text regarding modern political philosophy occurs in his *Prince*, chapter 15.

"It now remains to be seen what are the ways and rules for a prince as regards his subjects and friends, as distinguished from his enemies [he had discussed this before[15]—LS]. And as I know that many have written of this, I fear that my writing about it may be deemed presumptuous [you see, he is much more modest than Hobbes is—LS] differing as I do especially in this matter from the opinion of others. [He doesn't say "of all others."—LS] But my intention being to write something of use to those who understand, it appears to be more proper to go to the real truth of the matter than to the imagination thereof. And many [he doesn't say "all"—LS] have imagined republics and principalities which have never been seen or known to exist in reality. For how we live is so far removed from how we ought to live, that he who abandons what is done [the ordinary practice—LS] for what ought to be done, will rather learn to bring about his own ruin than his preservation. A man who wishes to make a profession of goodness in everything must necessarily come to grief among so many who are not good. Therefore it is necessary for a prince who wishes to preserve himself to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge and not to use it, according to the necessity of the case."[xi]

In other words, the prince must use virtue *and vice*, according to the circumstances. Good action is no longer virtuous action but shrewd action. Here we have a decisive opposition of the two considerations: a political teaching which takes its bearings by how men *ought* to live, and a teaching which takes its bearings by how men *do* live. This is not the same as our present fact-value distinction, because Machiavelli's teaching is as normative as that of Plato, only the norms are very different because according to him the Platonic or other norms are based on the assumption that men are good, and he starts from the opposite assumption, that at least most men are bad—which is a very inadequate analysis, of course, but I leave it at this for the time being.

Now in the *Discourses*, book 1, chapter 46, he quotes from a Roman historian, Sallustius. And in quoting Sallustius he changes somewhat the text. And the prevalent view today is that he wrote it from memory and it has no importance. I have come to doubt of this assumption. At any rate, the passage as misquoted or amended by Machiavelli is: "All evil stems from good beginnings." All evil stems from good beginnings. Now surely the biblical view says that the beginnings were good. The relation to classical philosophy is somewhat more complicated. All evil stems from good beginnings, i.e., we must start from bad beginnings, if we want to build up a stable society. Well, this has become elementary in modern thought: the beginnings are bad, savage, preliterate, underdeveloped, and what have you. At the beginning[16] (we can state Machiavelli's thought),[17] there was not love, but terror. And by opposing that fundamental terror, the terror of the state of nature in Hobbes's language, men build up civil society, and they will do it better the better they know that they have to count only on themselves. Since he speaks of evil examples, I would like to remind you of what Machiavelli says about good examples. Good examples, Machiavelli says, arise from good education, and good education is a consequence of good laws, and good laws ultimately go back to good founders of societies, or legislators. But who are these model founders? Well, men like Cesare Borgia, if this name means anything to you, or the Roman emperor Septimius

[xi] Apparently Strauss's translation.

Severus, whom Machiavelli himself calls a criminal and a mixture of a fox and a lion.[xii] So in other words, the roots of goodness, of that kind of goodness of which man is capable, are laid by people who are the very opposite of good.

Now incidentally, the passage which I read to you from the *Prince*, chapter 15, is used in Spinoza's *Political Treatise*, chapter 1. And here that is very interesting, because Machiavelli is not, according to the official cataloging, a philosopher, but Spinoza is. [18][But] Spinoza takes over this whole statement about the errors of the past and in what they consist: [19][we] have to take men as they are and take [20][our] bearings from that. Now colloquially or vulgarly, we may say what is characteristic of men like Machiavelli and Hobbes is that they claim to oppose a realistic teaching to the idealistic teaching of the past, and I think as a provisional formulation [that] this is even indispensable. But we must not forget for one moment that what they tried to do was to erect on this so-called realistic basis an ideal order, so much so that Hobbes at the end of chapter 31 of the *Leviathan* compares his *Leviathan* in a certain respect to Plato's *Republic*. It has this in common with Plato's *Republic*: that it is a blueprint of a perfect society. The perfection is much lower than that aspired to by Plato, but perfection it is. According to a very common view, this modern development was an idealistic development. Carl Becker wrote a book, *The Heavenly City in the Eighteenth Century*,[xiii] but what is forgotten here is the difference between the heavenly city of the eighteenth century and the heavenly city of Plato and Aristotle—that the foundations of the heavenly city of the eighteenth century were lower, the foundations of the heavenly city of Plato and Aristotle were higher. Plato and Aristotle, we may say (and of course that is true of the whole tradition of these great men), wanted to delineate the character of the just society by taking their bearings by men's perfection, by the highest in them. And these modern thinkers, trying to think in low but solid terms, tried to take their bearings by the lowest, but for this very reason the most powerful, in man. The perfection of man, the highest perfection of man, is very rare, as everyone has admitted at all times; therefore you cannot count on it. But can you not find something which is very common, which you can find [very powerful] in every man, or almost every man?[21] And if you build on that a civil society, then you have built upon a solid foundation.

Now this solid foundation is according to Hobbes man's urge, necessity, to preserve himself, meaning the individual's urge to preserve himself, in other words, his fear of death and more specifically, since we are speaking of social matters, his fear of violent death, of death at the hands of other men. Hobbes is not particularly interested in death due to disease or illness. (There are some very amusing documents of that.) The only violent death which interests him is that coming from the hands of other men.[22] And Hobbes waxes poetic when he begins to speak [23]of the fear of death and its majesty as *the* solid foundation of civil life. But speaking now wholly unpoetically, the fear of violent death is only the worst side of the desire for self-preservation. In the traditional scheme, most clearly presented in this point by Thomas Aquinas, the desire for self-preservation is of course recognized as a fundamental inclination of man. But there is another one, the

[xii] For Machiavelli's opinion of these two men, see *The Prince*, chapters 7 and 19.
[xiii] Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932).

inclination towards society, which occupies a higher rank; and the third and highest is the desire for knowledge of God, or desire for knowledge generally speaking. These higher stories are out: they do not play any role in Hobbes's construction of civil society. This only confirms what I said before, the lowering of the standards. The higher ones must somehow shift for themselves.

There is another implication which I can only mention here, but I think I must mention it. In the traditional doctrine, especially as presented by Thomas Aquinas, these natural inclinations of man give rise primarily to duties. I mean, it goes without saying that self-preservation is a duty, as is shown by the fact that suicide is a sin. The rights are somehow derivative from the duties. This is radically changed in Hobbes. The fundamental phenomenon is not any duty but the right to preserve myself, and any duties which come in are derivative from the fundamental right. And this we find nowhere with such clarity as in Hobbes. Here you can also see the "quote realistic" character of this modern doctrine. That people should do their duties, one can only hope. But that they should be concerned with their rights, and fight for them: this is a much safer, more realistic assumption. In Edmund Burke [24][we] find very beautiful remarks about this philosophy of the rights of man, as I quote from memory: "The catechism of the rights of man is easily learned; the conclusions are in the passions."[xiv] You don't have to think about it. But it would be more precise to say: the premises are in the passions, and the passion of fear[25] [of violent death].

I must say something, as a matter of fact quite a few things, about the developments after Hobbes; otherwise we will not understand the whole issue of the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns and what is its subject, its fundamental subject. I must of course limit myself to the most telling and striking facts; therefore I will not speak now of Locke but I will turn immediately to Rousseau, because Locke, however important he is—in many respects the fundamental scheme of Locke is not so different from that of Hobbes, as one would assume. The practical consequences which Locke drew from it are totally different, we can say, from the practical conclusions which Hobbes drew. But the theoretical differences are not so great. I would like now to make a pause and see whether there is any point you would like to take up at this point. It might help me to clarify it, and it might help also you to clarify your thought. Yes, Mr. Levy?

Mr. Levy: Could you just repeat once more the reasons why scientists want to know the history of science, as shown by Einstein writing that book?

LS: I said the mere fact, the brute fact, that there is today a much greater interest in the history of science. In Wisconsin there is an Institute for the History of Science. I do not know when that started. [It was] rather recently founded.

Mr. Levy: I just wanted to know what the reason for that is.

[xiv] From *Thoughts on French Affairs* (1791). The actual quotation is: "The little catechism of the Rights of Men is soon learned; and the inferences are in the passions."

LS: I believe it has something to do with the so-called crisis of modern thought, that certain things which were indubitable and a matter of course are no longer so. Whether that is a conscious motivation in every historian of science is a different story. Yes?

Student: How is it that . . . [xv]

LS: . . . which would compel us to qualify this statement. There was a tendency that still exists, I believe: you know [26][when] people today who have no knowledge of earlier thought—say, they know nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought to some extent, and they read Hobbes for the first time. And that is of course all very outlandish, very medieval, and now they look at a medieval text and say: Oh, yes, that is much more medieval than one would think. In the case of Spinoza, who was also a very revolutionary thinker, a very competent and very learned man has presented him as the last of the medievals.[xvi] So why did these people make these mistakes? Because they didn't listen to what Hobbes and Spinoza themselves said about what they were doing.

Student: That's why, then, you use this standard provisionally.

LS: Yes, sure. But I must say, I believed Hobbes for quite some years until I began to understand Machiavelli, and then I saw that the fundamental step was taken by Machiavelli, with this not unimportant difference: that Machiavelli simply was uninterested in the whole issue of natural law and natural right, whereas Hobbes was [interested]. And therefore Hobbes as it were tried to apply Machiavelli's insight, stated in this chapter 15 of the *Prince*: let us take our bearings by how men live and not by how they ought to live. Hobbes tried to apply this Machiavellian insight to natural law. That is the peculiarity of Hobbes. But the first decisive step was taken by Machiavelli, but that took some time. I could explain, but that would be better discussed in a seminar on Machiavelli than here. Good.

Now then I will turn to Rousseau, because in Rousseau this kind of political philosophy, which Hobbes had started, reached its first crisis. Rousseau's argument is in a way very simple. Hobbes had said: Man is by nature asocial, presocial. And yet Hobbes took it for granted that these presocial men, who led this life that was solitary, nasty, brutish, and short, were able to enter civil society by making the social contract with one another.[27] Rousseau as it were says to Hobbes: Look, if man is by nature presocial, then he is by nature prerational. He cannot have reason if he doesn't use language, and these people in the state of nature, each in his foxhole and with no communication with the others, of course would not have a common language. They might have common sounds, but not a common language. Therefore Rousseau takes this great step[28] [of questioning], what Hobbes did not do, the traditional definition of man as a rational animal. Rationality is an acquisition of man, it does not belong to his nature, and he suggests provisionally but nevertheless importantly that the true definition of man is that man is a being endowed with *freedom*, as distinguished from rationality. We will see later on that this was a very

[xv] There is a break in the tape at this point.
[xvi] H. A. Wolfson, in *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934).

important and powerful change. Now, but if the state of nature is a state in which [men are] presocial and prerational[29]—that means in which man is a stupid animal, as Rousseau himself says—how can one gain a standard for human conduct by looking at man in the state of nature? That seems to be absurd.

Furthermore, according to Hobbes man has no natural end. That was understood in the whole tradition in spite of certain differences of opinion: that man has a natural end, or rather a variety of ends, which however lead up to one highest end or highest good. Now I [will] read to you what Hobbes has to say about this matter. *Leviathan*, chapter 11, "Of the Difference of Manners": "By manners, I mean not here decency of behavior, as how one man should salute another, or how a man should wash his mouth, or [laughter] pick his teeth before company, and such other points of the small morals; but those qualities of mankind that concern their living together in peace and unity."

In other words, I think Hobbes underestimates the importance of decent behavior for men living together in peace and unity. I don't want to—you easily know the examples of what men could do in company which would make their company unbearable. [Laughter]

"To which end we are to consider that the felicity of this life consists not in the repose of the mind satisfied. For there is no such *finis ultimus* (utmost aim), nor *summum bonum* (greatest good), as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers. [This keystone of the whole tradition: out.—LS] Nor can a man any more live whose desires are at an end, than he whose senses and imagination are at a stand. Felicity is a continual progress of the desire from one object to another, the attaining of the former being still but the way to the latter . . . So that, in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceases only in death."[xvii]

I think we can leave it at that. There is no highest good, there is nothing in which men's desire could find repose, could come to an end. But this desire for power after power is of course infinite and only externally cut off by death. But we must have some fixed point to take our bearings. Since this cannot be found in the end of man, Hobbes finds it in the beginning, by which I do not mean a baby now born, but men at the beginning, man in the state of nature. This beginning is in a way the end, because by being so abysmally bad it points away from itself to civil society. In a negative way, surely it is an end.

Now Rousseau goes much beyond[30] Hobbes in this direction, for, as I said, in Hobbes the state of nature points toward civil society, but not in Rousseau. According to Rousseau the state of nature is good, and hence why should any sane individual wish to leave it? On the contrary, since the state of nature is good and we do no longer live in the state of nature, the formula would rather be "Let us return to the state of nature," which formula is used by Rousseau, and it needs a long commentary, but it is not entirely wrong. Incidentally, when Rousseau treats childhood with unusual respect in this pedagogical work [the] *Emile*, that has also to do with the questioning of teleology. From the

[xvii] *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1914 [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, n.d.]), chapter 11.

traditional point of view, childhood is the preparation for adulthood: childhood is teleologically ordered toward adulthood. But if there is no teleology, childhood is as perfect as adult[hood], and therefore childhood has a value for itself and not merely as a preparation.

Now the state of nature in Rousseau undergoes a variety of modifications of a fundamentally accidental character, [and] with the consequence that the state of nature becomes eventually like Hobbes's state of nature and therefore must be abandoned. To that extent he rejoins Hobbes at this point. Yet in spite of that the state of nature remains the standard in Rousseau, since just civil society comes as close to the state of nature as civil society possibly can. For what is the peculiarity of the state of nature? That man is not subject to any authority, that he is free in this sense. Now Rousseau's formula is that by entering civil society, man must remain as free as he was theretofore, i.e., in the state of nature.

Now let us consider this somewhat more closely to understand it better. The construction of Hobbes was this. Man has by nature the right to self-preservation; therefore he must have the right to the means of self-preservation, say, a stick, or a gun or whatever—or for that matter, also food, which was less important for Hobbes than it was for Locke; it's one of the great differences between the two men. Where Locke also is the more realistic one, as you will see—what is the use of all the sticks in the world or guns in the world if you don't have food and water? This is then the key question in this argument: means may be apt or inapt, and a reasonable man would say [that] man, if he has a right to the means of self-preservation,[31] has of course only a right to apt means of self-preservation. But here judgment comes in: some people are good judges and others are bad. Who is going to judge of the means of self-preservation? The Hobbean answer: everyone must be the judge, and not merely the wise man. And the reasoning can be stated very simply as follows: the wise man has better judgment, but he has much less interest in the self-preservation of the fool than the fool [himself]; therefore let the fool be the judge. Everyone is the judge.

Now Rousseau, starting from this, makes this crucial step beyond Hobbes and Locke: this right of the judgment of self-preservation must be preserved *within* civil society, whereas Hobbes and Locke had said or implied [that] this right to judge ceases in the moment men enter civil society. Now what are these judgments on the means of self-preservation in civil society? What is their popular name? Laws. Therefore, according to Rousseau, justice demands that in civil society everyone subject to the law must have had a say in the making of the law. That is a strictly necessary consequence. This may be very just; but still,[32] if the majority are fools, as Rousseau would admit (and would even emphasize), what kind of laws will we get, if everyone has the same say as everyone else? Mind you, there is no representative or parliamentarian democracy here, but direct democracy. Direct democracy. Rousseau must therefore say that if this provision is accepted, the justice or reasonableness of the positive laws is guaranteed. If no one is subject to the law who did not have a say in the making of the law, then the justice or reasonableness of the laws is guaranteed. In his terms, the general will, the will of the legislator, cannot err. Or, the sovereign is always what he ought to be. A sovereign in the

strict sense can only be a community consisting of free and equal members; otherwise it wouldn't be sovereign but a tyrant, according to Rousseau. Now if this is so, if the general will cannot err, it follows that there is no possibility nor need for ever appealing from the positive law to the natural, obviously. If you have a mechanism which produces invariably just and wise laws, you don't have to appeal from these laws ever to a higher law.

A society constructed according to natural law [never has to appeal to natural law]; that is what Rousseau wants to say.[33] And this of course gives a high degree of legal clarity: the positive law is unquestionable from any consideration of justice. Here we see again, in a different way, what I called the "realism," in quotation marks: the coincidence of the Is and the Ought. The sovereign is always what he ought to be, which when you hear it first sounds sheer insanity. According to the traditional view, men's desire must be subject to a vertical limitation. [LS writes on the blackboard] Here is man's desire, and then there comes a limitation from above, either from the divine will or from man's perfection—it does not make any difference. What Rousseau, and by implication Hobbes and Locke, had in mind is that this is out.[34] How did Machiavelli put it? This leads to the notion of imaginary principalities and imaginary commonwealths. For Machiavelli, the kingdom of God would of course also be an imaginary kingdom. The only limitation which we can trust is the horizontal one: the will of others. The will of others. They will react and prevent us from [general laughter] —I am reduced to the status of certain animals. [LS apparently refers to his gesticulation; further laughter.] In other words, the vertical limitation is only an Ought and as powerless as Oughts are. The vertical[xviii] limitation, consisting in man's desire limited by the desires of his fellows, this is in principle sensible. But of course this can also lead in itself to chaos: my desires are thwarted by [those of] others, and I thwart those of others, etc. How can this be done rationally? That is Rousseau's question. Or, [and] this is the same question, only another formulation: Why is the general will beyond error? The answer of Rousseau is this: by generalization. But I have to explain [this]. I have desires, all kinds of silly, foolish, irrational desires, [and] the same is true of my fellows. But then we introduce a mechanism. We say: The ultimate judgment of which desires are legitimate and which are illegitimate depends on the law,[35] the making of which will depend on your vote as much as on that of anybody else. Simple example: I enter the assembly, the town meeting, with the irrational desire not to pay any taxes. I can't stand up and say: I don't want to pay no taxes. [Laughter] I have to say: There ought to be a law that no one should pay any taxes. In other words, in the moment I conceive of my desire in terms of a law, in the moment I express my desire in terms of a law, I become already more reasonable, to say the least, than I was before. So the generalization of my particular foolish, vicious will is almost the fully sufficient remedy for my unreasonability.

You see here again, in this concrete example, I do not hold my desire against a natural law, an unwritten eternal law. What is sufficient to bring about justice, rationality, is the mere form—generality—which is of course rationality. Reason always speaks in general or universal terms. In other words, the rational order, the order of the just society, is not the order according to nature in any sense. The natural order as Rousseau understands it

[xviii] Strauss apparently means "horizontal" here.

is radically conventional, counterrational. Counterrational. By nature, men are unequal according to Rousseau, but the social contract replaces the natural inequality by conventional equality, and that is justice. You remember what I said before about certain changes regarding the concept of nature. Keep this in mind; I will later bring it together.

Now if this is so, if my will, my desire, becomes rational by taking on the form of a law, then I may say that by obeying the law, everyone obeys himself. He obeys the law which he has imposed upon himself. He is free because he does not obey any other man. Freedom, obeying the law which one has imposed on oneself, is self-determination. There is no reference to something outside of man in any manner or form. But there is a serious difficulty here which I would like to present to you in Rousseau's own words. *The Social Contract*, book 1, chapter 8.

"The transition from the state of nature to the state of civil society produces in man a most remarkable change. It substitutes in his conduct justice for instinct, and gives to his actions the morality which they previously lacked. [In the state of nature, there was no morality.—LS] Only at that moment does the voice of duty replace the physical impulse, and right replace appetite. And hence man, who hitherto had been only self-regarding, sees himself compelled to act on other principles, and to consult his reason before listening to his inclinations."

So the state of civil society is a state of reason, as Hobbes has said before.

"Although he deprives himself in this state of many advantages which he had from nature [against Hobbes—LS] he regains therein so great ones. His faculties exercise themselves and develop themselves. His ideas extend, his sentiments become ennobled, his whole soul rises to such a point that if the misuses of that noble condition did not degrade man often beyond that state which he left, he would bless unceasingly the moment which liberated him from it forever, and which from a stupid and narrow animal, made him an intelligent being and a man. [A human being: in other words, presocial man, prepolitical man, is not truly a man.—LS]

"Let us reduce this whole balance to terms easy to compare. What man loses by the social contract is his natural freedom, and an unlimited right to everything which tempts him and on which he can lay his hands. What he gains is civil freedom, and the property, the true ownership, of everything he possesses. In order not to deceive oneself in these points, one must well distinguish the natural liberty which has no limits except the forces of the individual from the civil liberty which is limited by the general will [i.e., by law—LS].

"One could add to the acquisitions of the civil state a second point: moral liberty, which alone makes man truly master of himself. [Moral liberty is not civil liberty; it is more than civil liberty.—LS] For the impulse of appetite alone is slavery; and the obedience to the law which one has prescribed to oneself is liberty. But I have already said enough on this point, and the philosophic sense of the word liberty is here not my subject."[xix]

[xix] Rousseau, *Social Contract*, book 1, chapter 8. Presumably Strauss's translation.

Well, the difficulty here is this. Moral liberty is something very radically different from civil liberty. Civil liberty can be understood fundamentally in Hobbean terms as derivative from self-preservation. Can this be done regarding moral liberty? In an important part of his *Emile*, the profession of faith of the Savoyard vicar, Rousseau has presented this issue of moral liberty in terms of the traditional spiritualistic, or dualistic, metaphysics, in other words, God and the soul as a substance different or radically distinguished from body or matter. The question [36]concerns the status of this metaphysics. According to Rousseau himself, that metaphysics is exposed to insoluble objections. What is the tenable basis of moral freedom if it cannot be found in traditional dualistic metaphysics? This is the question. Rousseau has not developed this theme sufficiently, and one reason, and perhaps the decisive reason, is this: because Rousseau saw a moral alternative, if we may say so, to moral liberty, to the life of duty or of virtue. And this he called goodness. Goodness, as he understands it, is strictly natural, i.e., not acquired by human effort, and something fundamentally different from virtue and duty. To elaborate that would take an infinite time.

By virtue of his doctrine of goodness, which one can call a very sentimental doctrine—this kind of goodness which is perfectly compatible with doing rather terrible things, as Rousseau himself did; I mean, that he sent his children away to an orphanage was surely not a virtuous action, as he admitted, but it was perfectly compatible with his goodness, which gives you an idea of how far this goodness can lead. But however this may be, Rousseau's concern with this difference between goodness and virtue is the explanation, I believe, why he did not elaborate, [or] try to find a new basis for, moral liberty as distinguished from civil liberty, and a basis different from traditional metaphysics. The man who did this, on the basis of Rousseau, was Kant. And we cannot understand the whole issue if we do not consider, briefly at least, Kant's solution to that problem.

I see it is now time. I would like to mention only one point regarding Rousseau which may explain the situation somewhat better. Hobbes had started from self-preservation, preservation of the existence of each, as *the* fundamental [37][thing]. Again, Rousseau thinks here more deeply than Hobbes does on the Hobbean basis. He raises this question: Must you not presuppose that life or existence is good if you attach to self-preservation, to preservation of life, the importance which you do attach to it? How do you know that life, sheer life, mere life, mere existence, is good? Rousseau says, "I know it," and he refers to something which he calls the sentiment of existence, in which man becomes aware, senses directly, the goodness of life as life. It is possible that this is the first reference to the whole question of existence which is now in the center of discussion. At any rate, to remain with the key to the issue of greatest concern to us, we shall follow up next time the problem of Rousseau by seeing in a very provisional manner how Kant solved Rousseau's problem, and put therewith moral and political philosophy on an entirely new basis, and the net result—[38]I think that I should not keep you in wholly unnecessary tension—the key point which I am trying to make is this. The result of Kant's work is that from Kant on, the moral law is no longer a natural law, what it still was up to Kant. Nature has nothing whatever to do with morality—an exaggerated formula, but a sufficient one. To live according to nature, which was the formula of the

ancients, becomes a meaningless phrase. The depreciation of nature, which is already clearly visible in Hobbes, as seen in the very notion of state of nature as used by him, becomes decisive for modern thinking, and this is the substantive reason why political philosophy as originally understood by the classics has become incredible. So in other words, after I have presented some important stages of modern thought, we are somewhat better prepared for understanding the beginning of classical political philosophy.

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[1] Deleted “of”
[2] Deleted “what I said.”
[3] Deleted “want—we.”
[4] Deleted “when.”
[5] Moved “down.”
[6] Deleted “and”
[7] Deleted “That.”
[8] Deleted “one.”
[9] Deleted “who were there.”
[10] Deleted “and.”
[11] Deleted “namely.”
[12] Deleted “just as.”
[13] Deleted “But if we take.”
[14] Deleted “when.”
[15] Changed from “that we have discussed before”
[16] Deleted “there is.”
[17] Deleted “at the beginning.”
[18] Deleted “Yet”
[19] Deleted “you”
[20] Deleted “your”
[21] Moved “very powerful.”
[22] Deleted “Now.”
[23] Deleted “of this desire”
[24] Deleted “you”
[25] Deleted “primarily”
[26] Deleted “there are”
[27] Deleted “and.”
[28] Deleted “that he questions.”
[29] Deleted “men”
[30] Deleted “this than.”
[31] Deleted “he.”
[32] Deleted “if everyone.”
[33] Moved “never has to appeal to natural law.”
[34] Deleted “This is.”
[35] Deleted “on the law.”
[36] Deleted “is or”
[37] Deleted “point”
[38] Deleted “Of this will be.”

Session 9: February 3, 1965

Physis* and *Nomos

Leo Strauss: Now I led up to the point that the possibility of political philosophy is today controversial, but on the other hand the possibility and necessity of the history of political philosophy is generally admitted. I showed then that the primary theme of the history of political philosophy is the quarrel between the ancients and moderns. This issue, the quarrel, is necessarily seen to begin with from the modern point of view, for the ancients could not possibly know the quarrel which the moderns would raise. In the first stage, indicated by the names of Hobbes and Machiavelli in particular, we find what we provisionally and colloquially call realism opposing itself to the imagined, imaginary principalities and republics of the classics. We might say [that] men like Hobbes and Machiavelli, and many in alliance with them, oppose the utopianism of the classics. The term utopia was coined in 1516 by Sir Thomas More in his *Utopia*, and More is on the side of the classics. That was an act of irony, to speak of utopia, but not an act of rebellion against the classical tradition. The meaning of that attack was that the classics aimed too high, ultimately because they had an unfounded trust in human nature and in nature in general. It suffices to remind you again of Hobbes's expression, "the state of nature," the state in which nature put man—a most undesirable state. In his *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundation of Inequality among Men*, Rousseau uses as a motto a statement from Aristotle's *Politics*: "What is natural must be viewed not in depraved things, but in those which are according to nature." Now he quotes it in Latin translation. One could as well have said in Latin: not in depraved things, but in those which are in their natural state, in *status naturalis*, the state of nature. This is the old meaning of the state of nature according to which the state of nature is the state of health, of perfection. Even in Hobbes, "state of nature" has sometimes this meaning, but this is of course the old meaning, not the meaning peculiar to Hobbes and also to Rousseau. Let us keep this in mind. Ultimately, at the root of the whole dissent we find a radical change regarding nature.

I spoke last time especially of Rousseau's critique of Hobbes. In this critique, the project of Hobbes and Locke and other men of that generation experienced its first crisis. Rousseau argues that precisely if the state of nature is presocial or asocial, as Hobbes had asserted, it must be prerational. Hence man in the state of nature, strictly understood, must have been not yet a true human being but a stupid animal. Here the question arises immediately: How can the state of nature[1] any[2] [longer be] used as a standard, if the state of nature is subhuman? The state of nature was a kind of standard for Hobbes (for Locke too), but negatively: since it was so terrible—nasty, brutish, and short—let's get out of it as fast as we can. It pointed away from itself to the state of civil society. Furthermore, according to Rousseau the just or healthy society [3]no longer need[s] or permit[s] an appeal from the positive law to the natural law. That's another sign of the depreciation of nature: the appeal to the natural law is no longer possible or necessary. But still we want to have just positive laws, not unjust ones. Now the justice of the positive laws is

guaranteed according to Rousseau by the mere form of law: the law is made by the citizen-body; everyone subject to the law must have had his say in the making of the law, and the law pronounces only on general subjects. This guarantees the justice of the positive laws. So the form of law, the mere fact that it is general, is sufficient: you do not have to have recourse to human nature and to a natural law.

But there remains a great obscurity in Rousseau regarding the relation between political liberty and moral liberty, or between law and morality in general. Morality proper, according to Rousseau's presentation, is based on [a] dualistic metaphysics, a metaphysics which distinguishes between corporeal and incorporeal substances, the latter being God and the soul. But that dualistic metaphysics, according to Rousseau, is exposed to insoluble objections. Now these difficulties, which Rousseau encountered but did not solve, were solved by Kant. Kant is the greatest pupil of Rousseau. There is an autobiographic diary utterance of Kant to the effect that it was Rousseau who brought him into the right shape—a statement which he has not made about any other man. [There is] a very famous statement of Kant about what he owed to Hume: Hume awakened him from the dogmatic slumber, Kant said, but this is not comparable in breadth to what Kant says about what he owed to Rousseau.[i] Now we have therefore to turn to Kant and mention the bare minimum without which we cannot understand anything.

Now according to Kant, morality cannot be based on this dualistic metaphysics, which according to Rousseau is exposed to insoluble objections. God and the soul are unknowable. This does not mean that the opposite view, say, materialism, the view that everything that is is corporeal, is true. Materialism, or the view underlying modern physics, has as its premise the principle of causality. And this principle of causality, on which the whole edifice rests, had been subjected to a radical critique by David Hume. One can reduce the gist of Hume's critique to this formula. Science, rationality in the highest sense, rests on an irrational foundation: custom, mere custom, not rationality, is underlying our thinking in terms of causality. Kant, opposing Hume [and] trying to save the dignity of science, asserts [that] science is rational, but it is limited to the phenomenal world, which Kant distinguished from what he called, with a strange expression, the "thing in itself," meaning beings as we cannot know them but which must be supposed to underlie the things which we know, the phenomenal things. Reason supplies only the form of knowledge; for its content, it depends on sense experience. Hence there cannot be knowledge of nonsensible things because we do not have any sense data regarding God and the soul. More precisely, that which makes possible knowledge of the phenomenal world is the understanding in contradistinction to reason. It is the understanding which prescribes nature its laws. By "nature" Kant understands here the totality of phenomena, of things of which we can have, directly or indirectly, sense experience. Reason proper, that in man which is not and cannot be dependent or cooperative with sense experience proper, supplies only so-called regulative principles, not the constitutive principles, not

[i] Strauss is apparently thinking of Kant's comment that "Rousseau set [him] straight" in his Remarks on the *Observations of the Beautiful and Sublime* (Ak 20: 44). The comment about Hume is made in the Preface to the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (Ak 4: 260).

the principles underlying the understanding of phenomena in common sense or in science.

Now, while[4] pure reason—the title of Kant's book was *The Critique of Pure Reason*[5]—is so weak in the sphere of theory, it is sufficient for man's guidance as practical reason in the practical sphere. Reason as practical reason depends in no way on experience, whereas all theoretical knowledge depends directly or indirectly on experience. Practical reason prescribes, without any borrowings whatever from experience, universally valid laws of action. The only access to the absolute—one could say, to the infinite—we have according to Kant is through the moral law, not through science. Now this implies that the laws prescribed by practical reason—think of such laws as "Thou shalt not lie"—the moral laws are not based in any way on knowledge of nature, and in particular of human nature. Hence the moral law can no longer be called, as it had been called before, the natural law: the natural laws from now on are laws like the Newtonian laws, whereas in the older usage, the moral law was called natural law. Now why is this?

The moral law must be valid not only for men but for *all* intelligent beings, that is to say, for God too. And hence, how can it be based on the understanding of human nature? And the reason which Kant would give is this: if God's actions are not to be understood in terms of the moral law, then God might conceivably do things which are unjust. Think of the great difficulties regarding the sacrifice of Isaac, or any other problems of this kind. This tendency of the whole eighteenth century to subject God to the moral law reaches its climax in Kant's teaching. Furthermore, the moral law must be universally valid, without any ifs and buts. For example, thou shalt not murder: no ifs and buts. Thou shalt not lie: no ifs and buts. But knowledge of human nature is based on experience, and experience cannot supply universally valid or apodictic laws. Experience can tell us only [that] this was so always hitherto. But that doesn't tell us anything about the future, and if you think of the importance of the future, especially of the social future, for moral orientation, that is of course an enormous liberation for all kinds of things which seem to be denied by any previous experience of men. The moral law cannot be based on anything else or cannot be deduced from anything else. It cannot be derived from nature or from God: not from nature because we have only empirical knowledge of nature; nor from God because we do not have any theoretical knowledge of God. The moral law therefore liberates man from the tutelage of nature, which includes here also previous custom. If the moral law were a natural law, Kant asserts, nature would impose a law on man. Therefore there would be what Kant calls heteronomy of the will: the will dependent on something outside of the will. The will would not give a law to itself; nature would give it [6][to you]. And therefore there would not be self-legislation strictly understood, or autonomy. If freedom is autonomy, the will must give a law to itself and must not borrow it or take it over from any other source.

Now how is such a moral law possible? The moral law is the law of reason, pure reason, in no way dependent on experience in any shape or form. Where does it get its content? Kant's answer is this: the *form* of reason supplies the content. The form of law—and law means generality, universality, rationality—is sufficient to supply the moral law. And this is formulated by Kant in what he calls the categorical imperative, which claims to be an

authentic interpretation of what we all experience when we have a bad conscience, for example. It is that in us which reminds us of our duty. Now the categorical imperative says: Act in such a way that the maxims of your action can be made and be understood as universally valid laws binding all intelligent beings. That reminds of Rousseau's more narrow consideration regarding the positive law. I remind you of that example. I enter the assembly with the desire not to pay any taxes, and then I have to express this desire in the form of a law: From now on, no one has to pay any taxes. [LS taps on the table for emphasis.] I am replaced by "anyone," that's the generalization. And then I can see perhaps that my desire is foolish, because if no one pays any taxes there will be no roads, no hospitals, and what have you.

Now Kant radicalizes this profoundly. He speaks not of my desire but of my maxim, implying that in all our actions we make use of general principles whether we are aware of it or not. Maxims of the syllogism. For example, some people act on the maxim: I want to get along in the world by hook and by crook. They may not even know that they are acting on that, but they could know. And now,[7] Kant says, we make an experiment. Let us conceive of this or any maxim as a universally binding law: Every man is morally obliged to get ahead in the world by hook and by crook. Not only permitted but obliged, that is the meaning of law. And then we can see, Kant asserts, that this is impossible as [a] universal law. Men could not live if they were all obliged to act in this manner.

If this is the character of the moral law, which has infinite political implications, it is impossible to criticize political proposals, such as universal peace, United Nations, or in whichever form these things may appear, on the grounds that they disagree with human nature or with experience because experience means previous experience. And what can we possibly know of what man is capable of in the future? Morality as Kant understands it liberates man from the tutelage of nature. That man is able to do what he is morally obliged to do goes, for Kant, without saying. "Thou canst what thou oughtst." Man is capable therefore, for example, of establishing perpetual peace. The only criterion which remains here, since no recourse to human nature is possible, is that of sheer self-contradiction. So in other words, sheer self-contradiction, i.e., formal irrationality, this is a clear sign that the law in question cannot be a moral law. The fundamental concern is with the moral law. That means also it is not with the good, or in particular with the highest good, or the end. I read to you a passage last time from Hobbes where he rejects the notion of the *summum bonum*, in *Leviathan*, chapter 11. In a different way, in a very different way but still not entirely unconnected, Kant rejects the starting of moral reflection from the good. No concept of the good, including the highest good, as an object must determine the moral law, [but] the moral law in its turn determines the concept of the good.

The traditional view from classical antiquity was: To live well means to live according to nature. In order to understand Kant's reasoning, we raise this simple question: Why is this so? Why is living well living according to nature? Why is the natural order, granted we know it, in a way, good? Which is after all presupposed. Are not the basest and most destructive passions as natural as the noblest thoughts? In other words, we would have to raise the question: Which natural inclinations are to be respected, and which are to be

rejected? This question is answered by Kant's categorical imperative. The natural order is to be respected. It is good to the extent to which by transgressing it I will something which I cannot will to be a universal law. For example, if I desire food, food which I need for the sustenance of my life, I can easily see that a moral law commanding everyone to seek food for the sustenance of his body is compatible, is thinkable, as a law obliging all men. But if I desire to be superior to others and transform this into a universal law, "Everyone should strive to outdo everybody else," [then] I see chaos. The only thing which we know to be irreducible to anything else, or to be of absolute worth, is the moral law, or a will agreeing with the moral law, a good will. Kant believes [this is] to act in agreement with our ordinary, everyday, prephilosophic moral understanding. We take it for granted that we should be decent, and if someone raises the question "[But] why should I be decent?," he has already ceased to be decent. That makes sense. And if this is properly elaborated, we arrive at the view that the law that we ought to be decent does not have a Why. It cannot be reduced to anything else. Man owes his dignity to the moral law alone.

From this one can draw the conclusion, which Kant himself did not yet draw but Fichte, a famous successor of Kant, did: Man's duty consists in subjugating everything else, in him and without him, to the moral law, because everything else has no intrinsic worth.[ii] Let us assume that the moral law demands from everyone virtuous activity in the sense of full and uniform development of all his faculties and the exercise of the faculties jointly with others, which would be compatible, which would be susceptible of the universalization spoken of. But is such a development possible? As long as everyone is crippled as a consequence of the division of labor or of social inequality, then how can he develop all his faculties jointly with others in such a condition? A difficulty raised by Fichte. [8]From here there is only one step to what one can call Marx's moral principle. Marx speaks very emphatically of the pushing back of the nature-limit. Nature is only an obstacle to be overcome or a thing to be used for man's moral purpose: nature does not supply a guidance in any way.[9] The foundation for that was laid by Kant more than by anybody else.

I would like to mention only a few points regarding the later development. In the eighteenth century, prior to Kant, a new discipline of philosophy emerged: aesthetics. This thing did not exist in the past. There are discussions [of the beautiful], and that was a very important theme in the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions.[10] But now a new science emerges[11], not metaphysics, which deals with the beautiful, and that is aesthetics. The name comes from the Greek word *aisthēsis*, sense perception, and it is indicated that the beautiful is the sensuously beautiful. In the Platonic tradition it was understood that you cannot understand the sensuously beautiful except in the light of the intellectually or, let us say, ideally beautiful. This connection is divorced: the sensuously beautiful—sounds, colors, and so on—are to be understood on their own terms. [This is] the theme of aesthetics.

Now in the post-Kantian development of aesthetics (and the greatest of them is probably Hegel's aesthetics), it is still admitted that there are things by nature beautiful, say,

[ii] Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), German philosopher of the post-Kantian idealist school.

human bodies, horses, certain breeds of dogs, and so on, but all things by nature beautiful are infinitely less important from the point of view of beauty than works of art. It is for this reason that today "aesthetics" means for all practical purposes the philosophy of fine art and has no longer anything whatever to do with things by nature beautiful.

I will read to you a few more passages from a much later thinker, but belonging to the same tradition. Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, number 9.

"'According to nature' you wish to live? O, noble Stoics, how your words deceive! Think of a being like nature, immoderately wasteful, immoderately indifferent, devoid of intentions and considerateness, devoid of compassion and a sense of justice, fruitful and desolate and uncertain at the same time. Think of indifference enthroned: how could you live in accordance with this indifference?"[iii]

In other words, the thought of living according to nature is based on a total misunderstanding of how nature truly is. There is another paragraph in the same work of Nietzsche, number 188:

"Every morality, in contrast to *laisser aller*, is a work of tyranny against 'nature,' and also against 'reason'; but this is not an objection to it, not unless one wished to decree, proceeding from some kind of morality, that all types of tyranny and irrationality are to be forbidden. What is essential and of inestimable value in each morality is that it is a long-lasting restraint. To understand Stoicism or Port-Royal or Puritanism, it is well to remember the restraints under which any language hitherto has reached its peak of power and subtlety—the restraint of metrics, the tyranny of rhyme and rhythm.

"How much trouble have the poets and orators of each nation always taken—not excepting several of today's prose writers with an inexorable conscience in their ear—'for the sake of a folly,' say the utilitarian fools, who think they are clever. 'In deference to arbitrary laws,' say the anarchists, who imagine they are free, in fact free-thinkers. The strange fact, however, is that everything of freedom, subtlety, boldness, dance, and craftsmanlike certainty that one can find on earth, whether it applies to thinking or ruling or speaking or persuading, in the arts as well as in codes of conduct, would never have developed, save through the tyranny of such arbitrary laws. Indeed, the probability is strong that this is 'nature' and 'natural'—and not *laisser aller*."

Since not everyone knows French, what's the ordinary English translation of *laisser aller*? "Let things go." And so he develops it at relatively great length in this paragraph.

"Look at any morality, you will see that it is its nature to teach hatred of *laisser aller*, of too much freedom, and to implant the need for limited horizons, for the nearest task. It teaches the narrowing of perspectives—in other words, stupidity in a certain sense, as a necessary condition for life and growth.

[iii] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, § 9. Apparently Strauss's translation.

"'Thou shalt obey—someone or other and for a long time: if not, you perish and you lose your last self-respect'[iv]—this seems to be the moral imperative of nature. It is neither 'categorical' to be sure, as old Kant demanded (observe the 'if not') [the categorical imperative doesn't say "if not"—LS] nor is it directed to any individual (but what does nature care about an individual?). But it is directed to peoples, races, times, classes—and above all to the whole animal known as man, to mankind."[v]

Now this paragraph is remarkable for other reasons too, not directly connected with what I am discussing now. But the remarkable thing is this: throughout the paragraph Nietzsche uses the word "nature" in quotation marks, except in the last statement, where he mentions nature. And Nietzsche was an extremely careful writer, and this is not an accident. In this strange use or nonuse of quotation marks, a profound difficulty reveals itself. Nietzsche cannot strictly speak anymore of nature; therefore the quotation marks. And yet he needs nature.[vi] He cannot speak anymore of nature strictly speaking. Nature has become for him radically problematic. That which for Kant was the justification of nature, namely, that nature is the only rational interpretation of sense data, of the phenomenal world (and only the phenomenal world)—this has become doubtful for Nietzsche. We can say [that] the understanding of things in terms of modern science or, for that matter, in terms of Greek or Babylonian science (whatever you take) is a historically contingent way of interpreting things, to use the most general term we can use here—in other words, the phenomenon which we have discussed under the heading *historicism*. Now if we draw a conclusion from these remarks, from these examples which could be considerably enlarged, we may make this tentative suggestion, and I believe surely a worthwhile suggestion: that what is characteristic of modernity from its beginning until the present day is the questioning of nature as it was understood in classical and premodern times in general.

Now this seems to be an absurd, not to say idiotic, statement. Who does not know of the immense importance of natural science, the science of nature, in the modern world? But the question is: On what is the emphasis, when we speak of natural science in modern times and in premodern times? "Natural science" is used by the Greeks as well as by the moderns. But in premodern times, the emphasis is of course that it is the science of *nature*. The emphasis is altogether on nature. In modern times, the emphasis is altogether on *science*, so much so that we don't even bother to add *natural* science. [12][When] a man is a scientist, [13][he] is of course a natural scientist; when he is a scientist of another kind, then we say [he is] a social scientist. This is a qualified scientist, not a scientist simply. In other words, reminding you of some things which I have alluded to before, the great questionings of nature: whether nature, as the concern of modern natural science, is not a human construct and by this very fact not nature proper. I am aware of the fact that there is, or at least was, a school in this country in this century which called itself Naturalism.[14] Now this seems to show that nature is very important and crucial also for moral orientation in our time. But this can easily be shown to be incorrect because the

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[iv] Nietzsche has "the last self-respect."

[v] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §188.

[vi] For a more complete version of Strauss's argument, see Leo Strauss, "Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*," *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, 174–91.

characteristic thesis of Naturalism is: nature is not a term of distinction. In plain English: everything that is is natural. But if everything that is is natural, that makes nature questionable the other way around, which we shall see very soon when we consider the rudiments of the original conception of nature. This was indeed[15] a most important ingredient of the whole modern development. I quote to you a sentence from Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, chapter 4: "All things are determined by the laws of universal nature, both regarding existence and operation, in a certain and determined manner."[vii] In other words, every event—every event, whether it is a human action, or lightning, or whatever you have—is determined [and] must be understood ultimately in terms of the universal laws of nature. In the formulation of Naturalism: nature is not a term of distinction. And we will see later on, as I indicated,[16] when we turn to the Greek notion of nature, the premodern notion, we shall see immediately that even for so-called materialists, "nature" is a term of distinction: not all things are natural. We are of course familiar with that fact without any learning, from ordinary understanding: "this is not a natural thing proper, it is an artifact." But I will have to take this up in a broader context.

Now after this general remark, necessary for the reason indicated about the modern development, I would now like to turn to the beginning, to Greek or classical political philosophy. But before I do that, I would like to find out whether there is any point you would like to raise now. Mr. Glenn?

Mr. Glenn: From what little I know of John Dewey, I don't think he fits into the modern Naturalism—

LS: I think he does—well, I don't claim to be an expert in that matter, but this sentence which I quoted, I found in a book, *Naturalism*, edited by people who were affiliated with Dewey.[viii]

Mr. Glenn: I think he still looks to nature for a guide to moral activity.

LS: Yes, well, that is quite true, and I see now what you mean. That is quite true, [that] there is, at least in Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct*, which is, I suppose, his most important ethical work—this has a formal character which reminds of Aristotelian ethics.[ix] It's undeniable. To that extent he indeed uses nature as a guide. The content, the substance, is wholly un-Aristotelian,[17] what he says—you know this book, I take it—about the cooperation of impulse and custom or, rather, custom and impulse, how they must cooperate and how they must be balanced to one another: this is somehow based on the nature of man or on the nature of human society. But[18] he can reconcile this with his general historicism or relativism by leaving it entirely open what kind of custom and what kind of impulse it is in principle. In other words, you know, in every stage of human development, except perhaps in very stationary societies, there is custom. And there is

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[vii] Benedict Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1925).
[viii] *Naturalism and the Human Spirit*, ed. Y. Krikorian (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944).
[ix] John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt, 1922).

also impulse, individual impulses partly generated by the very custom which rebels against it. And now what is necessary is to strike a reasonable balance between the two which would make possible the highest growth of the individual as well as of the society. But we would have—Mr. Glenn, *all* my statements are in need of long footnotes.[19] I mean, I am familiar with the fact that the Aristotelian tradition, in a way the same as the Thomistic tradition, lasted very long into modern times.[20] I am not speaking now of Catholic universities, but even in the Protestant universities of Germany the prevalent view in the eighteenth century prior to Kant was a modified Thomistic view. I am not speaking now of the theological teaching proper but the philosophic teaching. The orientation by the natural perfection of man was still there. But these men—[21]the most famous name was Christian Wolff—[22] are practically forgotten.[x] The men who molded modernity were those who opposed the classical tradition, and only in very rare cases are these reactionaries remembered. I think the most famous case is that of Swift, at least in the English-speaking countries.[xi] Good. Is there any other point you would like to raise?[23]

Student: [24]Maybe you're going to come to this, but how would Aristotle respond[25] to the modern view of nature? He surely must have recognized these—

LS: Not quite, no.[26] Let me state it as simply as I can. Such a thing as the view that there are only bodies or bodily things was of course known to Aristotle. Let us call this view materialism as it is ordinarily called. That he knew. Furthermore, he knew of philosophies which try to understand the whole somehow in mathematical terms. The Pythagoreans are the most well-known example. But the combination of corporealism with mathematics and, in addition, something which did not exist in classical antiquity, the modern experiment, namely, the experiment which is artificially planned. The word "experiment" means originally simply an experience. I go around and see a strange animal and describe it: that is an *experimentum*, but this is of course not the modern experiment. The modern experiment is what Bacon called something which comes out when you torture nature, put her to the question. That is to say, you try to bring about conditions which never or very rarely are to be found in nature—say, a completely airless motion, a fall without any air—and use these extreme cases, which strictly speaking occur never, as the key to everything. This would have been the Aristotelian reaction: How can you make an impossibility the key to what is actual? And[27] roughly, the resistance of the Aristotelians to the moderns, the primary resistance, had to do with that.

Same Student: On a lower level, though, Aristotle surely must have known that nature was not simply teleological, that there was a lot of, as Nietzsche says, waste—

LS: [28]No, he would not have granted that. I am sure that he would have tried to show that what we call waste is based on a very superficial understanding. To take one example which is quite well known: the enormous waste of human sperma for the generation of a single child, and it may not even lead to that intended result. I think Aristotle would say: How could it be otherwise, given the situation in the uterus and so on and so on, that you

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[x] Christian Wolff (1679–1754), prominent German rationalist philosopher in the period between Leibniz and Kant.

[xi] Jonathan Swift: see session 8.

have to waste very, very much in order to give a single sperma the chance to fertilize an egg? He would not have admitted that. And so on, but you have to ask someone who knows much more of modern science and understands[29] Aristotle's *Physics* and biological writings to answer that question properly.

I will now begin with my discussion of the classical thought, and I begin from the beginning. Since we seem to have observed that the key question concerns nature, we begin with the very first mention of the word "nature" in available Greek literature, and this is in Homer, in *The Odyssey*, book 10, the only mention of nature in Homer. The story is told not by Homer himself but by Odysseus. And Odysseus[30] [says] that his comrades had been captured by this goddess-witch Circe, and Odysseus tried to liberate them. But then a divine helper, the god Hermes, comes and warns him of the terrific powers of that witch and wishes to protect him. Hermes says to Odysseus (but we know it of course only through Odysseus):

"'I can keep you clear of harm, and give you safety. Here, take this potent herb and go to Circe's house. This shall protect your life against the evil day. And I will tell you all the magic arts of Circe. She will prepare for you a potion and cast drugs into your food. But even so she cannot charm you, because the potent herb which I shall give will not permit it. And let me tell you more. When Circe turns against you her long wand, then draw the sharp sword from your thigh and spring upon Circe as if you meant to slay her. She then will cower and bid you to her bed. And do not you refuse the goddess's bed. But that so she may release your men and care for you. [Odysseus was a married man, and this is not unimportant here.—LS] But bid her swear the blessed ones' great oath, that she is not meaning now to blot you a new woe, nor when she has stripped, to leave you feeble and unmanned.'

"As he thus spoke, Hermes gave the herb, drawing it from the ground, and pointed out its *nature*. Black at the root it is, like milk its blossom; and the gods, who have a different language, call it Moly. Hard it is for a mortal man to dig; but the gods can do everything."[xii]

Now this is a remarkable story. "The gods can do everything." The gods are omnipotent. But this is obviously not meant, because the gods are omnipotent as a consequence of their knowledge of the natures of things, and over these natures they do not have any control. This is the first statement, and it is rich in implications, some of which we will gradually make clear.

Things have their natures, which means here they have certain looks, and they have certain powers. This one has the power to protect one against Circe's charm. Looks and powers—in Greek, *eidos* and *dynamis*—are already here implied.

I give you another wholly unscientific or unphilosophic statement about nature, which is much later, but still relatively early. Thucydides speaks somewhere in his *History* of the

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[xii] *Odyssey* 10.286–306. Strauss reads from *The Odyssey*, trans. George Herbert Palmer (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1921), with slight changes.

nature of a locality or place,[xiii] by which he means[31] [that] they landed in enemy territory and it is important for them how the nature of the place is, obviously—whether it is a jungle or it is a place that you can see, etc. Now then he changes the expression, and instead of speaking of the nature of the place, he says: the place itself. The nature of the place is the place itself as distinguished from something which is not the place itself but something added to it. What could be added to it? Now in this case it is clear: fortifications, which they built in order to strengthen the place the more. More generally stated, the nature of the thing, the thing in itself, is understood in contradistinction to human art, to *technē*, from which such words as "technical" and "technology" are derived.[xiv]

. . . he is a just man, in addition he is a human being, and he has this and this color of the hair, and God knows what—this and this property. Justice itself, nothing added to it, and nothing lacking, because this just man may not be of perfect justice. That is the same as nature; therefore for Plato the ideas are the natures, however unintelligible that may sound at first hearing. But let us only keep this simpler Thucydidean passage in mind, where it is clear the thing itself, the nature of the thing, is understood in contradistinction to what men make of it, to human art.

Now we may say that thus far the notion of nature as discussed is commonsensical, prephilosophic, or prescientific. But here we must remind ourselves for a moment of our historicist friends who say: This was *Greek* common sense, not common sense without qualification, because not all languages, even [those] of very highly civilized peoples, have a word for nature. My favorite example is the Old Testament, where there is no such word. The point is that nevertheless the distinction is immediately intelligible to us today, I take it, and it was also without great difficulty intelligible to other nations who did not know Greek. The thought was easily translatable with the help of artificially coined words, for example into Hebrew and Arabic.[32] Up to this point, there is nothing particularly striking.

I remind you again of the fact that we owe this interesting story to Odysseus. Now Odysseus is one of the many Homeric heroes, but he is a peculiar man. He is very wily, as we know, but I am now concerned with another characteristic of his: he is the greatest traveler among the Homeric heroes. You know what happened to him on his way back, and he stayed longer away from home than anybody else. And[33] there were other Greek travelers on all kinds of levels, but the most famous of them after Odysseus probably is the historian Herodotus. Now let us see how nature appears in the light of travelers' experiences. I am speaking of very simple ones. The traveler, let us say, goes to Persia, and there he makes the observation that fire burns in Persia just as it burns in Greece. The example is taken literally from Aristotle.[xv] But why is this so strange? Because many things in Persia are so different from the way they are in Greece, for example, say the laws regarding inheritance. I know nothing about them, but I suppose they were different in Persia from those in Greece. Surely the forms of government were manifestly

[xiii] Strauss apparently has in mind Thucydides's *History*, book 4, secs. 3–4.
[xiv] There is a break in the tape at this point; the recording resumes in mid-sentence.
[xv] *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.1134b26.

different, and last but not least, the gods worshiped by the Persians differed from the gods worshiped by the Greeks. All these things, if we generalize, differ from country to country, whereas[34] the characteristics of water, fire, and so on do not differ. (I hope you will not hold against me that there might be hot springs in a given country and no hot springs in another one, but this is only a slightly complicated case. It doesn't affect the fundamental things.)

Now this leads to another distinction which is much more fertile in consequence: the distinction not between nature and art, which is elementary[35] —[the skin or the hide of the shoemaker, and then the shoe—but the] distinction between nature[36] and [LS writes on the blackboard] *nomos*. One can translate it to begin with by "law," "custom," "convention." The meaning is this. There are things which are by nature, say, dogs, lightning, and what have you. Then there are things which are by virtue of human making: shoes, chairs, etc. But there is a third kind of thing: things which are only by virtue of being held in reverence or, more generally stated and perhaps more precisely stated, by virtue of being *held*—using "holding" here in the sense in which it is used of judges, the holding of a judge, but not quite the same. [Of] being held, [of] being believed in. In the[37] accusation of Socrates, it is called: Socrates commits an unjust act by not believing in, by not holding in reverence, by not holding the gods held by the city. At this point we go beyond that which is the merely prephilosophic and prescientific understanding of nature, and this is decisive for the emergence of political philosophy. I will give you an example of that distinction which is at first glance perhaps not recognizable.

At the beginning of the seventh book of Plato's *Republic* you find the simile of the Cave, a simile which is meant to show man what his situation is in regard to true education, i.e., philosophy. Men are primarily cave dwellers, not in the sense of what modern prehistory tells us, but *we*, here, in the civilized country [or] wherever we are—we are cave dwellers. We[38] don't see the light of the sun, the natural light. We see nothing but the shadows of artifacts, and this we do only because there is an artificial light somewhere. Nothing but the shadows of artifacts. Artifacts remind us of course of the distinction between nature and *technē*, but the shadows of artifacts remind us [39][of something which is in a way] even less substantial, less fundamental, than *technē*. What Plato means to suggest is that men see primarily everything in the light of authoritative opinions—*authoritative* opinions, not just fabricated things. These opinions are in a sense man-made; therefore Plato speaks of artifacts. But they are not known to be man-made.

Now this distinction between *physis* and *nomos* is absolutely crucial. According to a well-known textbook version, this is an invention of the sophists, of certain more or less unscrupulous moneymakers and prestige hunters of the fifth century—of whom we have no writings left, by the way, or hardly any, and we know chiefly through Platonic dialogues. But this is historically simply not true. This distinction between *physis* and *nomos*, between nature and convention, is essential to classical political philosophy itself and even to the whole tradition, and there is a very simple proof. As long as the classical tradition lasted, a distinction was made between the natural law and the positive law: the natural law, which is by itself, and the positive law, which has its ground in human

decisions, human opinions. [This distinction was] crucial. I will indicate this briefly, postponing a development of that until next time.

Once this distinction had sunk in, the question arose: What about morality (as we call it)? The Greeks said: What about the just and the noble? Is this merely by convention, or is it at least partly natural? And this became, to begin with, the key issue. And one can say that classical political philosophy, the political philosophy[40] founded by Socrates, constituted itself by establishing the view that the just and the noble are fundamentally natural and not merely conventional. And the modern view, as we have already indicated, modified that very profoundly, of course not in the sense in which the sophists had understood that.

Before I go on I would like to read to you a remark of Hegel which is very helpful for clarifying the difference between the ancients and the moderns. Now this sentence reads as follows, and you must listen carefully because Hegel's sentences are quite complicated, and even the English translation, which I haven't made, has given the Hegelian sentences the simplicity of sentences of Addison.

"The manner of study in ancient times is distinct from that of modern times, in that the former, the study in ancient times,[xvi] consisted in the veritable training and perfecting of the natural consciousness. ["Natural consciousness" means here the primary consciousness, not yet specialized.—LS] Trying its powers at each part of its life severally, and philosophizing about everything it came across [in other words, proceeding in a very unsystematic manner—LS], the natural consciousness transformed itself into a universality of abstract understanding which was active in every matter and in every respect. [Although it was unsystematic, it was universal: there was no question which it didn't [41][address].—LS] In modern times, however, the individual finds the abstract form ready made."[xvii]

This, rightly understood, is very true. What happened in classical philosophy, especially political philosophy, is the primary acquisition of concepts, that is to say, of philosophic or scientific concepts as distinguished from the use of concepts already acquired—not to say the transformation of concepts already acquired. This is, I think, the peculiar charm which everyone experiences when reading a Platonic dialogue, but I think also when reading very important parts, at any rate, of the Aristotelian writings: this way which is not systematic, methodical in our sense, and yet very open-minded, and starting from scratch. Regarding classical political philosophy in particular, we must say that it is therefore, for the reason indicated by Hegel, closer to political life than modern political philosophy. This may[42] sound strange, given the utopianism of the classics and the realism of the moderns, but you have only to make one simple experiment. The most realistic and tough studies of political bosses, and any other kind of unsavory things,[43] are written of course in a certain language. I am not speaking now of what someone in a

[xvi] The repetition of "the study in ancient times" is not in Hegel.
[xvii] G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie, 2nd ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931), 94. Translation modified slightly by Strauss "in order to bring out somewhat more clearly the intention of Hegel's remark" (*What is Political Philosophy*, 75 n).

political campaign does—these are not scientific studies—but[44] you have read such studies, and this language is surely not the language of the political arena. Whereas the Platonic-Aristotelian analyses, however far away they might lead from what everyone in the political arena knows and admits, are written in a language which is fundamentally that of everyday life. One can say that there is not a single technical term in the properly political writings and parts of writings of Plato and Aristotle, whereas surely in modern times—to some extent already in the premodern tradition, but surely in modern times—a scientific or philosophic language takes over. If you take, for example,[45] such distinctions[46] [as] Hobbes's state of nature, state of civil society, as meant by Hobbes, no one would have ever thought of these things in political debate proper, whereas all the terms used by Plato and Aristotle for designating political phenomena are everyday terms. What they do, especially Aristotle, is to define them more precisely, and this more precise definition became then the great heritage of the West. But the starting point is ordinary understanding which we can with not too great difficulty reactivate for ourselves. Partly it is necessary for the purpose to learn something of Greek, so that one is not completely at the mercy of the translators. And one must take some other efforts—I have indicated the question when I spoke about Collingwood's partly justified criticism of modern philosophers.

After the foundation was laid, fundamentally after Aristotle, the relation of the political philosophers to political life was always mediated by an already existing tradition of political philosophy. No such tradition interfered at the beginning, in the founding epoch. Now this has a broader basis. Classical philosophy in general is not based on that peculiar skepticism on which modern philosophy is fundamentally based, as is most clearly shown in the case of Descartes. It is not based on a distrust of our primary awareness of things and people; therefore you can take over these terms. You have to make them clearer, avoid the ambiguities and so on, but fundamentally it is the same way of understanding. I will give you a simple example of the peculiar artificial character which modern thinking about these matters has as contrasted with the classical. Descartes began to speak of "the ego," and in some European languages they use even not the Latin word *ego*, but *le moi*, or in German, *das Ich*, in English, "the I"—only in English you can't use it well because people might think of this part of the body; therefore you have to say "the ego." But look at the formation from a linguistic point of view. Who speaks in ordinary life, if he is not corrupted, of "the ego"? And even here today, especially in half-psychoanalytical language—"inflated ego" and so on—this has something very strange and surely very artificial about it. People know of the ego not from ordinary experience but via science. Their understanding of their fellow humans is mediated by certain sciences, true or pseudoscience.

Now people became aware gradually, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that there is something wrong in that Cartesian egocentrism. And people became aware of the fact that I could not know myself as an ego, as an I, except if I recognized another man, at least, whom they called a "thou." And then they may of course also speak of the "we." Now no one would use these terms in everyday language, and we don't need them. But the phenomenon meant by these people who speak of the ego, thou, and we—[47]the true phenomenon of people living together in trust and

intimacy—was of course known to men like Plato and Aristotle because this is a necessity of human life. But how did they speak about it? They called it [48]friendship, "friendship" having here the broad meaning where of course the relation between husband and wife would also be a form of friendship. You see here, when you speak of friendship, you are much closer to the phenomenon than if you speak of the I, thou, and we, because when you speak of friendship you only continue what you do in everyday life. You say, "he is my friend," "they are friends." You would never say, except in a very stilted way: He is my alter ego. This can be said, but this is not the ordinary way of talking.[49] When you speak to him, you say "thou"—well, of course, not in present-day English, but in older English and in other languages which make a distinction between the second-person plural and second-person singular.

In other words,[50] in his philosophic discussions, [Aristotle (or Plato, too)] continues the way of talking about, which is the *ordinary* way of talking about. He does not even try to preserve, in philosophic or scientific discussion, the speaking *to* a friend. That would be absurd, but one could do that—[51]if Aristotle had written his treatises in the form of a letter to Nicomachus or whoever it might be, which also would be somewhat peculiar. [By] this I mean by the direct relation to political and ordinary life, which is preserved in classical political philosophy and which is not existing in modern political philosophy. This is only superficially in conflict with the fact that modern political philosophy is in a way realistic and classical political philosophy is "quote idealistic." Perhaps the very utopianism of the classics is more in agreement with what is going on in the marketplace than a certain toughness, tough-headedness, aspired [to] by present-day and earlier academicians. That we must perhaps consider later.

Generally speaking, I would say[52] the point of view which[53] [the classical political philosophers] take is that of ordinary political life, of the citizen or statesman, and they look in the same direction as he looks—the same perspective. They only try to look further afield, much further afield: it is not a *different* perspective. They do not have the posture of an outside spectator who sees the political arena as one in which the big fishes swallow the small ones, for example, [and] looking at it from the outside and then trying to learn something about human beings as one can learn about stones and rats, and then apply it. They have their stand in the political sphere and look at it as political men. This leads eventually to some complications, but this is surely the starting point, and we must keep this in mind if we want to understand. This is so to say the matrix of classical political philosophy.

Well, I will say a few more words about this and then pursue the theme of nature and convention more fully. And then I hope we can have a discussion about *the* classical work of classical political philosophy, Aristotle's *Politics*, and see what kind of a thing that is.

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[1] Moved "be."
[2] Deleted "more."
[3] Deleted "does"
[4] Deleted "reason has."
[5] Deleted "while pure reason."
[6] Deleted "law"

[7] Deleted “we try.”
[8] Deleted “But”
[9] Deleted “This is.”
[10] Moved “of the beautiful.”
[11] Deleted “which deals.”
[12] Deleted “We say”
[13] Deleted “that”
[14] Deleted “Naturalism.”
[15] Deleted “an important.”
[16] Deleted “that we cannot understand.”
[17] Deleted “It is briefly.”
[18] Deleted “since.”
[19] Deleted “You know?”
[20] Deleted “I mean.”
[21] Deleted “were.”
[22] Deleted “but these men.”
[23] Deleted “Yes?”
[24] Deleted “How would Aristotle and.”
[25] Deleted “to the view.”
[26] Deleted “I mean Aristotle… Well.”
[27] Deleted “that is.”
[28] Deleted “I do not.”
[29] Deleted “Aristotle.”
[30] Deleted “speaks.”
[31] Deleted “the nature of a place.”
[32] Deleted “Now let us—but still.”
[33] Deleted “there is.”
[34] Deleted “the fact that.”
[35] Deleted “the leather of the shoemaker—well the leather is already an artifact; let us say the skin, or the hide; and then the shoe. And that is a.” Moved “the hide.” Moved “of the shoemaker.” Moved “and then the shoe.”
[36] Deleted “and.”
[37] Deleted “charge, the.”
[38] Deleted “see nothing—we.”
[39] Deleted “in a way of something that”
[40] Deleted “constituted by.”
[41] Deleted “raise”
[42] Deleted “seem.”
[43] Deleted “these.”
[44] Deleted “you must.”
[45] Moved “take.”
[46] Deleted “like.”
[47] Deleted “as”
[48] Deleted “as”
[49] Deleted “he’s my friend.”
[50] Deleted “Aristotle starts (and Plato too).” Moved “Aristotle.” Moved “(and Plato too).”
[51] Deleted “if one were to write.”
[52] Deleted “what the political philosophy of the classics, classical political philosophy.”
[53] Deleted “they.”

Session 10: no date

Classical Political Philosophy; Aristotle, *Politics*, book 1

Leo Strauss: [In progress] —prescientific or prephilosophic thought, whereas in modern times, these concepts are inherited and they are ready for use. Used therefore, and which is more important, transformed, but no longer originally required, which implies that if we wish to understand the modern concepts which came into being through the transformation of those concepts inherited from classical antiquity,[1] we have to return first to the classical basis if we wish to understand the modern concepts. Classical political philosophy, we can also say, is related to political life directly, not through a nonpolitical medium [such] as the tradition of political philosophy or a nonpolitical political science, as in our age. And the simple sign of that is that in classical political philosophy there are no technical terms to speak of. The terms are terms used in ordinary political life—in the marketplace, in senates, in cabinets—but not peculiarly scientific or academic terms, whereas the opposite is true in modern times and [was] already to some extent in the Middle Ages. The classical political philosophers tried to understand political life as the citizen and the statesman understand it, with this difference: that they tried to look further ahead or afield than the practical men do, but not in a different perspective. They are not standing as it were outside and observing political life, the big fishes swallowing the small ones, but in the perspective in which they are seen in political life.

One can also say that the method of classical political philosophy is presented by political life itself. In all political life we find conflicts between individuals and groups, the conflicting parties asserting opposed claims, ordinarily in the name of justice. Now both sides use arguments in support of their claims. Not all these arguments are solid, but they supply nevertheless the starting point for any proper understanding of what supports the claim of the opposed parties. The method is therefore to follow up and consider critically the arguments presented on both sides and on this basis reach an impartial decision, because this is the primary form in which the political philosopher appears: as the arbiter, the impartial arbiter between the groups opposing opposed claims, an arbiter who will give each side its due. So the political philosopher is then primarily the umpire par excellence, the underlying thought being: he is a good citizen, and the duty of the good citizen is to make civil strife cease and to create by persuasion agreement among the citizens. He must not be a partisan.

Now in order to understand more fully the phenomenon of the political philosopher in its original form, we have to consider the fact that, as the umpire, the political philosopher is a citizen like every other citizen: he belongs to this or that city, as a rule, by birth: son of a citizen father and citizen mother. As such, he cannot fulfill his function in a city other than his own. His work is not transferable from his city to any other city. Yet one observes soon that[2] while this work as such seems to be nontransferable, there are necessarily in political life some skills which are [transferable]. For example, a general may be lent to an allied city, in ancient times as well as in ours. Or someone may be

banished from his city, like Themistocles was from Athens, and he may prove to be an excellent advisor to the enemy of Athens, the king of Persia. Or later on, Alcibiades, who also had to flee from Athens and yet was the best advisor whom the Spartans could find: since he knew the weaknesses of Athens better than anyone else, he could become an excellent traitor to his fatherland.[i]

So there are skills which are transferable, and to the extent to which they are transferable they are also teachable, in principle, like any other art. The teaching of the political arts developed first as that of one important part of the political art, which is the art of speaking. All political action, if it is reasonable, is based on deliberation. The deliberation takes place by means of speech. In a democracy, surely that means of public speech. And the art of public speech proved to be susceptible of being taught by teachers of that art, of the art of rhetoric. And prior to classical political philosophy, we can say, political science as a transferable thing had emerged as the art of rhetoric. And at the end of his *Ethics*, Aristotle takes issue with those people who say the political art is simply the art of rhetoric, a view which according to Aristotle is very erroneous.[ii] But at any rate, this was a fact, and this is surely not an accident, that the part of the political skill which was originally raised to the level of a teachable art was the art of rhetoric.

Now this is insufficient, from the classical point of view. Deliberation deals in the first place with measures, as we would say—say, war and peace, and the other things—but also with things of a more permanent character: war or peace *now*, the question of the moment. And these permanent things are the laws; therefore the more important, the broader object of deliberation is legislation. And that political science in the original sense of the term, where it is identical with the political skill, the skill of the statesman, was raised to the level of a transferable teaching when it could become the teaching of the art of legislation, the highest political art—as Aristotle says, the architectonic art, related to all other arts as that of the architect to that of the carpenter and other artisans connected with building houses.[iii] As the net result, the political philosopher then comes to sight not simply as a legislator, but as a teacher of legislators. Every legislator has to do with the particular situation of this city, located here and there with these and these enemies, these and these resources, and so on, and he tries to do the best for that city. But he cannot do this without having implicitly notions of what is simply good for the city as such, notions which he adapts to this particular city, not necessarily being aware of the universal principles of preference implied in what he is doing here and now. The teacher of legislators, i.e., the teacher of men who are supposed to give laws or to elaborate codes

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[i] Themistocles, an Athenian general and statesman, was the great hero of the Persian War who later fell out of favor and was exiled from Athens. He gained the confidence of the Persian king, who assigned to him several cities in Asia Minor; see Thucydides 1.135–138. Alcibiades was a prominent Athenian political figure who fled the city in 415 under suspicion of various religious offenses and generally of harboring subversive ambitions. He took refuge among the Spartans, whom he persuaded to establish a permanent fort at Decelea in Attica, to the detriment of the Athenian war effort. He later lost credit with the Spartans and eventually returned to Athens. His exploits are described in Thucydides, books 5–8.

[ii] *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.1181a14–15.

[iii] *NE* 1.1–2.

for the most different cities, cannot possibly be bound by the requirements of this or that situation of this or that city. He must think primarily in universal terms. Now these are then the two figures, we can say, in which the political philosopher primarily appeared in Greece: the umpire par excellence, and the teacher of legislators. There is a connection between these two things. The umpire has to do with the settlement of controversies. Now *the* fundamental political controversy concerns, as we may provisionally say, the form of government: should it be a democracy, oligarchy, and so on. This is the fundamental controversy. And the settlement of this controversy is prior; [it] precedes legislation proper, for all laws are to be made with a view to the form of government. Inheritance, publicity of speech, whatever you have, depends on the form of government. Therefore, by being the teacher of legislators, the political philosopher is the umpire par excellence.

Now these two considerations of which I reminded you—the distinction between *physis* and *nomos*, and what is implied in Hegel's remark about the difference of study in ancient and modern times[iv]—these two general considerations indicate the minimum conditions with which one must comply in order to have an access to classical political philosophy. But this is only a minimum condition. In order to understand classical political philosophy, or in order to study it properly, we have to wonder where we should begin our study of classical political philosophy. My answer would be: with Aristotle's *Politics*. Not with Plato, for the writings of Plato, the *Republic* especially but the others too, are dialogues [and] not, as Aristotle's *Politics* is, a treatise. In the dialogues, Plato never speaks. One could say: Well, while Plato never speaks, Socrates speaks, and Socrates is Plato's mouthpiece. Yet this is not so simple, as is sufficiently indicated by the fact that Socrates was most famous for his irony. Never to speak oneself and to have a spokesman who is famous for his irony: this is almost the same as if one were never to speak. More specifically, irony the word has undergone many changes in the course of the centuries, but in the primary meaning, or secondary meaning which for us is most important, it means to speak with a view to somebody: *ad hominem*, as the Latins say. So all remarks which, say, Socrates makes or any other Platonic spokesman, are made with a view to the interlocutors: their situation, permanent or momentary, their character, their abilities, their social position. And in order to find out what Socrates would say about the same subject absolutely, not with a view to this or that kind of man, one would have to translate the explicit statement into one which would be meant to be absolutely true. One would have to transform the relative statements into absolute statements, and this is not so easy to do, whereas in Aristotle we hear Aristotle himself talking to us all the time. This difference between Aristotle and Plato is also the reason why it is not wise to begin one's study of classical political thought with the dramatic poets, who of course speak as little by themselves as Plato does, and it would be a great mistake to believe that the choruses present directly the view, say, of Sophocles. Even in the case of the historian Thucydides, the most important, broad statements are not made by Thucydides himself but by his characters in his speeches. And then again the question arises: What did Thucydides think of the wisdom and understanding of the particular speaker?

[iv] See session 9.

So it is most prudent to begin the study of classical political thought with Aristotle. As for the so-called pre-Socratic philosophers, we have only fragments of them, and to interpret fragments, to understand them properly, is infinitely more difficult than to understand complete books.

Now as for how to study Aristotle's *Politics* in a very external way, meaning which translation to use, I would think that the best translation available is that by Ernest Barker, in the Oxford edition, which is also available, I believe, in paperback.[v] The translation is useful especially for this reason, that Barker gives in brackets explanation of the very terse statements which Aristotle makes and which to begin with would be wholly unintelligible. It is true that in this respect Aristotle becomes much more loquacious or talkative than he in fact is, and the peculiar charm that is characteristic of Aristotle is lost in that way. But you cannot have it both ways and, to begin with, one must be grateful for every help one can get. Barker has also written in this book a very useful introduction, in which he takes up an issue which is quite confusing and quite useless, namely, the question of the development, the so-called development of Aristotle's thought from his early time, when he was sitting at Plato's feet, until his old age, something which some philologists believed they could find out about, and Barker very wisely reaches the conclusion that it is impossible to say anything about that. But since you may be confronted with this issue of the development of Aristotle, it is quite good to read Barker's sober argument.

Let us then turn without any further ado to the beginning of Aristotle's *Politics*. And we will read at the beginning. Does every one of you have the edition? Well, I will read.

"Observation shows us, first, that every *polis* (or state) is a species of association, and, secondly, that all associations are instituted for the purpose of attaining some good—for all men do all their acts with a view to achieving something which is, in their view, a good. We may therefore hold[vi] that all associations aim at some good; and we may also hold that the particular association which is the most sovereign of all, the most authoritative of all,[vii] and includes all the others, will pursue this aim to the highest degree, and will thus be directed to the most sovereign, the most authoritative, of all goods. This most authoritative and inclusive association is the polis, as it is called, or the political association."[viii]

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[v] *The Politics of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962). Barker and Strauss use different translations of the key terms *polis*, *politeia*, and *arête*. Barker renders these words state, constitution, and goodness respectively, whereas Strauss translates them city, regime, and virtue. Strauss and his students substitute Strauss's translations of these key terms for Barker's in many, but not all, of the citations of Barker presented hereinafter. Substitutions of Strauss's translations of these words are not indicated in subsequent footnotes due to the frequency of their occurrence.

[vi] Barker's interpolation "[on the basis of what we actually observe]" is omitted.

[vii] The words "the most authoritative of all" are not in Barker.

[viii] *Politics* 1.1252a1–7.

Now Aristotle goes, as you see, immediately into the midst of things. The *Politics* naturally deals with the *polis*. Now the first question which arises, to which we have alluded before, is how to translate *polis*. Barker follows the usual procedure by saying "the polis, paren: or the state." But we have been reminded by Collingwood in some passages which I read to you that this is a grave question, whether one can translate it in this manner. Some people say today, in order to avoid the difficulty, "the city-state"—which doesn't make it better, because then we imply of course that we know what "the state" is and think there is a kind of state called the city-state—and believe[3] [they] solve the question in this way.

Now let us look at a later political thinker and his definition of what Aristotle means, roughly, by the *polis*, and that is Thomas Hobbes. Let us see how he defines the *polis*. "This done"—I will not read what that is—"the multitude so united in one person, is called a commonwealth; in Latin, *civitas*."[ix] But "*civitas*" was the traditional translation into Latin of the Greek "*polis*." So "commonwealth" would be a tolerably good translation of *polis*. Let us also see another translation of the term by Hobbes, which is somewhat closer to our concern, in the *Elements of Law*, part 1, chapter 19: "This union so made is that which men call nowadays"—he doesn't say "a state"—"a body politic, or civil society, and the Greeks call it *polis*, that is to say, a city."[x]

So you see, even in the seventeenth century the word "state" was not yet necessary, was not the most natural[4] [term] for a man like Hobbes to use.[5] Hobbes translates "*polis*" by "city," which is the best translation of the word, and he gives the equivalent in English of "a body politic or civil society." Now we shall then not hesitate to translate "*polis*" by "city," but we must be clear that this is only replacing one riddle by another: the riddle being the Greek word "*polis*," and then we replace it by the riddle in English, called the "city." For when we speak of city, we surely do not mean the *polis*. Think of the city of London, or the City *in* London, which has an entirely different connotation.

We have therefore to raise the question: What is the equivalent of "*polis*" in our world, in our language? Surely not "the state," for when we speak of the state, we imply a distinction between the state and society, and the very beginning of the *Politics* which I read to you shows that this is excluded. If we speak of state and society, we do not say the state is the all-inclusive society and society is only a partial society. The simple and best equivalent in English to what the Greeks meant by the *polis* is the *country*. When you speak of the country, say, "the country is in danger," you also don't make a distinction between state and society: you mean a single whole. The *polis* consists of the town and countryside, and so does the country, which consists of towns, cities, and countryside.[6] "Country," we may say, is the equivalent of "*polis*" on the level of our everyday citizen's understanding. But this is not sufficient, because we are not simply thinking on that everyday level. I wonder whether the term "the country" is ever used in a scientific treatise within political science or sociology, although it will occur frequently in political speeches. This shows you the cleavage between prescientific understanding and scientific understanding which is so characteristic of our age.

[ix] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 17.

[x] Hobbes, *Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, pt. 1, chap. 19, sec. 8.

Now the passage which I read to you from the very beginning of the *Politics* shows that the *polis* is concerned with the most comprehensive good, whereas the other associations, the associations subordinate to the city, are concerned with subordinate, partial goods. Now the term which Aristotle uses for this comprehensive good is in Greek "*eudaimonia*," ordinarily translated into English by "happiness." Let us not go into this great question of how to translate "*eudaimonia*"; let us simply use the word "happiness" for the time being: the complete human good. Now the *polis* is concerned with the complete human good. By happiness Aristotle understands above all virtuous activity, and of course this means that you dispose of the conditions of virtuous activity. So if you are very sick, for example, and for this reason not able to act virtuously in every respect, this shows indirectly that health is a part of happiness. But[7] of course different people have different views of happiness, and even the same people at different times of their lives. So one can assume—as men were more inclined to assume in modern times than in ancient times—that happiness is strictly subjective, and then of course it becomes impossible to define the end of the state in terms of happiness.

Political society cannot be defined, then, as a society devoted to happiness. This is perhaps the best starting point for understanding the peculiar obstacle which we have in understanding "*polis*." Yet when we look around and admit that there is an innumerable variety of notions of what happiness is, we can nevertheless hold that there is something in common despite this enormous variety, and that is certain *conditions* of happiness. Whatever you may understand by happiness, you need to be alive to pursue your happiness. Furthermore, you must have the possibility of circulation: you must be free; if you are chained or jailed, you are not likely to pursue your happiness, however you may understand that happiness. And thirdly, you must have the possibility of pursuing happiness as you understand happiness. I refer to a formula known to you all from the Declaration of Independence: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. They are understood here in the Declaration as man's fundamental, natural rights, but one can also look at them from the other point of view, in no way contradicting, that they are the conditions for happiness, however happiness may be understood.

Now here we have then this strange situation. Men are striving for happiness. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are only in the service of their enjoyment of happiness. Happiness is the end; life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are means, and therefore lower. But on the other hand, whereas happiness is wholly subjective—everyone understands something different by happiness—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are objective. Whatever you understand by happiness, you need life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Now men pursue happiness as each one understands happiness, and this takes place partly in cooperation with others, and partly in competition with others. This cooperative, competitive activity, where each aims at his happiness, produces a kind of web, we can say; and this web is society, in contradistinction to the state. The state only is concerned with the conditions as specified before.

Now in this understanding of the relation of state and society, there is a peculiar ambiguity. In one respect, the state is higher: it aims at something which all need, something of objective validity. But these are all only means, and therefore lower. The highest is no longer objective. In order to overcome this difficulty—this dualism where the order of rank between the two elements, state and society, is ambiguous—one must turn to something broader, of which state and society as hitherto understood are parts, and modern man succeeded in discovering such a thing, or in inventing it. And this matrix, of which state and society and some other things are parts, is exactly what is ordinarily understood by culture. When you speak of the culture of a tribe or a nation, or a city, it means this broader thing, this broader association of which state and society are parts. I would say that the concept of culture, now so widely used, is the equivalent of "*polis*" on the level of theory, on the level of academic thought as distinguished from citizen-thought, on which level the equivalent of "*polis*" is the country.

We would say, for example, that tragedy, dramatic poetry, belongs to culture—belongs to culture, but not to the state. Yet according to the classics, tragedy has a certain moral function—say, the purification of certain passions—and the moral function is inseparable from the political function, therefore tragedy belongs to the *polis*, as it in fact did in Athens. Surely tragedy is not exhausted by that moral-political function, but to the extent to which it transcends it, it belongs to the sphere of wisdom—of wisdom which is no longer a part of the *polis*. So in other words, what we would call culture is from the classical point of view a composite consisting of the *polis* on the one hand, and of wisdom on the other. And we learn from this, incidentally, that our concept of culture presupposes a much closer connection between *polis* and wisdom than the classics' did, that so to speak every *polis* has its peculiar wisdom, a thought which the classics implicitly rejected. Wisdom proper is universal, *de jure*—whether *de facto* is another question.

Now by making this reflection (which could be enlarged) on the modern equivalents of "*polis*," we do justice to the truth of historicism, namely, to the fact that radical changes have in fact occurred, so that the understanding of the most important and fundamental terms has changed. Now is there any point which you think needs some further clarification, or where you feel it could now be given? The last point is perhaps most difficult to understand,[8] that *polis* and wisdom are not only distinguishable but have a fundamentally different character insofar as the *polis* is always this or that *polis*, particular society, whereas wisdom is universal—*de jure*, as I said, if not necessarily *de facto*—whereas our modern concept of culture implies an assimilation of these two things. Yes?

Student: But doesn't the fact that the Greeks regarded tragedy as having a moral function which in turn was inseparable from a political function imply that they regarded wisdom, at least in the form of poetry, as being more subordinate to political—

LS: Ya, well, the word "wisdom" has many meanings. There is a practical wisdom which essentially belongs to practical, political life. I meant now "wisdom" in a severer and

stricter sense, where it is theoretical wisdom, say, the understanding of man—in tragedy, for example.

Student: Well, the fact that tragedy and the tragic view has some theoretical wisdom in it, and yet you say that the moral function of tragedy in Greece was inseparable from the political function . . .

LS: The moral function belongs together with the political function. It is the purpose of the city to make the citizens good and doers of noble deeds, as Aristotle says.[xi] That is inseparable. And Aristotle calls the whole teaching, which includes his *Ethics*, a kind of political investigation. That is not the point—I mean, the difficulty doesn't lie there. Well, let me start from another phenomenon which I have to touch upon later, without which one cannot understand this whole of classical [thought]. Our present-day thought, and already since some centuries, is based on a fundamentally different understanding of the relation between theoretical wisdom and ordinary human life than the classics had, and especially Aristotle had. And the change was effected by that great movement popularly called the Enlightenment, but which is much more than the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, which comprises already the seventeenth century.[9] According to the Enlightenment, wisdom can be spread, can be diffused among the whole population, and therefore the difference between the theoretically wise and the theoretically non-wise ceases to be very important. Does this thought make sense to you? The very notion of an enlightenment of this kind is absent from classical thought, and therefore there is no simple harmony between philosophy and the *polis*, between wisdom and the *polis*. Wisdom[10] is, according to its own intention, universal; the *polis* is necessarily particular.

You see, what we have done in modern times is also shown by the following fact. The word "culture," which means only cultivation in itself—or say, of the soil; but of course men then speak also of the cultivation of the mind—was also used in former times in the singular: *cultura mentis*. But then in the nineteenth century people began to use the term "culture" in the plural: "cultures." That is to say cultures were now understood to be particular in the same way, or almost the same way in which political societies are particular, you see, whereas according to the older notion there is only one culture of the mind or of the heart. This assimilation of the culture of the mind to political life is a modern phenomenon [11]underlying our present use of the term "culture." Today in the ordinary meaning, even in anthropology, culture has nothing whatever to do with any cultivation of the mind. When you speak of the culture of juvenile delinquents of a certain district, you do not think seriously of any cultivation of the mind. That is a still further step. But originally, in the nineteenth century "culture," even if used in the plural, meant high culture. Then it was applied to every "quote culture" of every tribe, and then finally of course also to every subdivision of any society, however small and deplorable.

Now let us first follow Aristotle's argument. Aristotle goes on to prove that the *polis* is the highest and the most comprehensive association, and he tries to prove that by considering the most important among the other associations. These are the family or the household, and the village.[12] At this point we take up his discussion.

[xi] Possibly a reference to *Politics* 3.1281a2–3.

"Man, when perfected, is the best of animals; but if he be isolated from law and justice he is the worst of all. Injustice is all the graver when it is armed injustice; and man is furnished by nature with arms[xii] which are intended to serve the purposes of prudence and virtue, but which may be used in preference for opposite ends. That is why, if man[xiii] be without virtue, he is the most unholy and savage being, and worse than all others in the indulgence of lust and gluttony. Justice[xiv] belongs to the polis; for justice, which is the determination of what is just, is an ordering of the political association."[xv]

Now what has he in mind here? Let us first take another consideration. The *polis* comes into being out of natural associations, such as the household; it comes into being out of natural associations, therefore it is itself natural. In a sense, it is even more natural than the preceding associations. That is here Aristotle . . . difficulty . . . the translation . . . In a sense, the city according to Aristotle is even more natural than the household and other preceding associations. Why? Because all the other associations are in a way imperfect. They do not fulfill all of man's natural needs. Being imperfect, they point to the city as its perfection. The end of a natural thing is most emphatically the nature of the thing. A simple example: [if] we want to know the nature of a horse, we look at a grown-up horse in a good state of health, etc., meaning that a colt or a sick horse is a defective horse. The nature of a thing is the thing in its perfection. The point with which Aristotle is here concerned is not only that the *polis* is natural, but above all that it is natural as *city*, namely, as essentially different from the household. Some other thinkers to whom Aristotle alludes, the most important of whom is Plato, had asserted there is only a quantitative difference between the household and the city.[xvi] Aristotle says: No, there is a qualitative, an essential difference, and that is to say, in other words, the *polis* is natural precisely in its character as *polis* and not merely as an overgrown household. The key implication of that is that if the *polis* is by nature—the thesis with which in a way the whole book begins—[13] [then] the *polis* is not by convention. It is not by contract, to use the term used later on very frequently.[14]

This being the case, that the *polis* is by nature, it follows that man is *by nature* the political animal. By nature. And why? Because what is the peculiarity of man, the thing characteristic of man, the specific difference of man? The fact that man possesses *logos*, speech or reason. And speech or reason is the reason why man is political. Aristotle says man is more political, more social, than all other social animals. *Logos*, speech or reason, socializes much more than anything else could, for without *logos* there would be only a sensual awareness, in particular, awareness of pleasure and pain. And this does not bind men together to the same degree as other kinds of awareness. Through *logos* we have awareness also of just and unjust. We can go a step further and say that the perfect union of two human individuals, of two individuals in general, is possible only in and through thought: if they think identically the same. Such an identity regarding feelings can never

[xii] Strauss omits from his reading Barker's interpolation "[such as, for instance, language]."
[xiii] In the place of "man" Barker has "he."
[xiv] The interpolation "[which is his salvation]" is omitted.
[xv] *Politics* 1.1253a31–39.
[xvi] *Politics* 1.1252a7 ff.

be known, even if they use the same words. If you take the simplest case: they follow the same demonstration of the same theory, there can be no doubt that their thoughts are fully united. They think exactly the same.

The *polis* is natural to man also in another sense. As Aristotle explains later on in book 7 more fully, the city is what we would call a fairly small society: a society in which everyone knows not everybody else—that would be a village—but in which everyone can know an acquaintance of everybody else, so that he can find out about that man, for example, if he is running for office, by direct knowledge. Also, the *polis* as Aristotle understands it is a society large enough to fulfill all man's essential natural needs, and small enough so that it is commensurate with the limitations of man's natural powers of knowing and of caring. We can know, in a way we all know President Johnson and Vice President Humphrey, but in which way? From the TV. That is not knowledge in the sense in which you know someone with whom you have grown up, or who has grown up with your parents, and so on. In other words, one can say that a *polis* is a society small enough so that it can be addressed [by a speaker] without the help of any artificial things.[15] They can be assembled in body and addressed by[16] [him].

In the passage which I read to you, Aristotle makes it clear that man, to the extent to which he is not political, to which he is prepolitical or apolitical, [and] not by accident but incapable of living with others, is very bad. What Aristotle speaks[17] about [here] reminds of what Hobbes said of the state of nature, and what Hobbes expresses by saying that man is by nature—i.e., without social discipline, without being subject to laws—[18]asocial. But what is the precise difference between Hobbes and Aristotle? That is of some importance. Now why is man such a nasty being according to Hobbes? What makes him so nasty? What Hobbes calls pride: concern with being superior to others and with being recognized as superior by others. This is the reason why Hobbes regards him as asocial. Now Aristotle would reply: But what you say proves men's asociality proves men's *sociality*: a being who is radically dependent on the opinions of others is a radically social being. In other words, Hobbes has not thought deeply enough; he mistakes antisociality for asociality. But these antisocial people you see and hear a lot these days, and they are of course in a very radical sense social. They are so much concerned with being important, as they call it, and since they cannot become important by legal ways, they try to get it by illegal ways. But "important" means of course being looked up to by others, a radical sociality. Hobbes mistakes sociality for benevolence. But malevolence also is social, also antisocial. And a radically asocial being would not be in this sense malevolent.

Now the Aristotelian doctrine that man is by nature social became the traditional doctrine throughout the ages until it was attacked, especially by Hobbes, in the seventeenth century. And in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a running controversy between those who said that man is by nature social and those who denied it. The doctrines asserting men's natural sociality were at that time called the socialist doctrines, and the others the antisocialists. You see how much the meaning of these terms has changed. By the way, what is true of socialism applies, of course, in a way still more to individualism. For example, the Stoics are famous for their individualism, but in this

sense they are of course socialists because they too teach the natural sociality of man. This only in passing.

Now when Aristotle says that the *polis* is by nature, he means more than [that] the *polis* is not conventional. He excludes also the view that another kind of political association is by nature, at least to the same degree as the *polis*, and that is the *ethnos*, in Greek. We can translate it by "tribe" or "nation": a nonurban association of nomads, or tillers of the soil, or whatever have you. One can [19]explain the exclusion of the *ethnos* in the following way. Man is born for civilization. "Civilization" is derivative from *civis* (citizen) and *civitas*; and[20] there is also a Greek equivalent for that, pointing to *polis*. Man is born for civilization, and in a tribal life he cannot find that.

The proposition that the *polis* is natural means furthermore that the city is not sacred. When Homer and other poets speak of the city, say of Troy, they call it the "sacred city." Aristotle calls it natural. This is also an important consideration. It is confirmed by the fact that in Aristotle's discussion of the virtues in the *Ethics*, piety does not occur. Aristotle emphasizes in the *Politics* that the concern with divine things is a part of the concerns of the city—temples, sacrifices, and so on. But he indicates the ambiguous position of this concern by the following remark. In enumerating what the concerns of the city are—one, two, three, four, five, and so on—he says, at the fifth and at the first place, the concern with the divine things. In other words, from one point of view this is of course the most important, the first place. But from another point of view it is not. This is a hint which needs thinking through. The concern with the divine things is a part of the concerns of the city but also it transcends the city, namely, in the form of philosophy, which from Aristotle's point of view is of course the highest form of the concern with the divine things.

This view is, by the way, also confirmed by the *Republic*. The [21]venerable old man Cephalus, the father, at the beginning goes out to sacrifice, whereas Socrates discusses the best political order with the younger men. One could find other examples. Surely this peculiar secularism must not be identified with the modern secularism, for the simple reason[22] [that] Aristotle was not a man of the Enlightenment. But the situation is clearly enough indicated at the beginning of Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*, where a man, an interlocutor, [23]has been reminded by Plato's *Republic* of the old Egyptian order, in which the place occupied in Plato's *Republic* by the philosophers is occupied by priests, and he is not aware of the difference as Socrates or Plato were. It is definitely not a priestly order, the *polis*, although it necessarily includes priests.

Now the bulk of the first book of the *Politics* is devoted to the household as the most important part of the city, or to the management of the household. Management of the household is in Greek *oikonomia*, from which the English word "economics" is derived. In a way, Aristotle takes up the economic questions, but all within the context of the management of the household. The question of finance and any public economy is not taken up in any way.[xvii] —except that he defended slavery. Now that is true, he defended slavery. I shall speak of that immediately. But it is not sufficient to know only this fact,

[xvii] The tape was changed at this point.

because then one doesn't know why he defended it and what are the conscious limitations of his defense. Aristotle starts from the fact that slavery is a controversial thing. Some people say [that] to rule as a master over slaves is against nature, for it is merely by *nomos* that one man is a slave and the other a freeman, and by nature there is no difference. And since it is not based on nature, it is unjust: it is merely an act of violence. Nature is violated by that institution.

Aristotle states the problem in these very simple terms: Is slavery natural or conventional? If it is only conventional, it is, as matters stand, unjust. In order to answer this question, he must of course first define what is a slave. The answer is: a possession, a piece of property which is animate. Not like a pot or a hammer, but more specifically, an animate tool, not for the purpose of production of things, but for the purpose of life or use, or action. Life is action, not production. Action or use, not production. Production is only in the service of life, but not life itself. In other words, a slave is not understood here as a tool of producing things in mines underground or in factory-like undertakings, but as a household slave, as a helper for man in his life. [24]Aristotle asserts that slavery properly understood is natural. In order to show that, he starts from the fact that the whole of nature has a hierarchic character. Everywhere we find higher and lower: something which by nature rules, and something which by nature is ruled. The example nearest home is the difference between the mind—the soul—and the body. Desire, passions: they belong to the soul in contradistinction to the mind. And the mind is by nature the ruler of the desires and the passions, and the soul in its turn is the ruler of the body. Also the difference between the male and female, which is not limited to the human race, is [25]a sign of the hierarchic character of the whole, the male being the ruling part. The soul rules the body, Aristotle says, like a master does, i.e., as if the body were a slave, namely, by sheer command, not by persuasion. We cannot talk to our body as we can talk to our anger, for example, and therefore the mind, the soul, rules the passions politically by persuasion.

Now the slave participates in speech sufficiently as to be able to listen to speech, but not to have *logos* within himself. This is Aristotle's definition. And such a man is therefore justly enslaved and no violence is done to him—on the contrary, for him it is useful to be a slave, just as it is useful to his master to have him as a slave. Now what then is a natural slave? A man who can understand in the way in which no animal can understand, no brute animal can understand, and yet not sufficiently that he can guide his own life. He needs someone else to guide him. Take an example of someone who can understand the command: Bring five logs into the house—one, two, three, four, five. He can do that; no dog could do that. But on the other hand, he couldn't take care of himself because he might be wholly incapable of controlling his desire for alcoholic beverages and for other things. The greatest presentation of what Aristotle understands by a natural slave, now from the less amiable side, is the presentation of Caliban in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, where, if you remember[26] the situation, the thought that Caliban deserves to be controlled by Prospero, and at Prospero's command to be tricked by Ariel and so on, is not a shocking suggestion. The question is: How great can the political relevance of this fact be? Aristotle thought it is very great. So slavery is therefore natural if applied to people who are by nature slaves. If it is applied to people who are not by nature slaves, it is

plainly injustice, so, for example, to enslave people merely because they have been taken as prisoners in war, this is unjust.

Now we will see later on that this is not the last word of Aristotle on the subject. Later on, in books 7 to 8, where he describes the best commonwealth as he sees it, slavery is taken for granted, and he proposes there that the slaves be given the prospect of emancipation. Now this would be clearly impossible in the case of natural slaves, because they are by definition people who cannot be emancipated because they cannot take care of themselves. Therefore Aristotle must there assume that you will have also slaves who are slaves only by convention, i.e., who are unjustly slaves. How this can be reconciled with what we read in book 1 we must postpone.

Now Aristotle continues the discussion as follows:

"It is clear from this explanation of what the slave is that the rule of a master and political rule are not the same [as Plato among others seems to have considered it—LS] For the one, political rule, is rule over free men, the other is over slaves. And the rule within the household is monarchical, for every household is ruled by one man; while political rule is the rule over free and equals. The ruler is not called ruler with a view to the knowledge which he possesses [as when we say a man is a physician with a view to the fact that he possesses the ability, skill, and knowledge of the physician—LS] but because he is such a one [meaning, because he is a master—LS] And the same applies also to freemen and slaves" [they are not freemen or slaves because of peculiar knowledge which they possess—LS].[xviii]

Aristotle goes on to say that this does not mean that there is not a certain kind of knowledge which slaves, for example, must have. There was a man in Syracuse, he tells, who had a school for slaves where they learned the kinds of things they had to do in the household. And it is also possible to say there is a kind of knowledge which the master needs in order to give commands to the slaves. But Aristotle says this is not something grand, this kind of knowledge, and he who can afford it will have a bailiff who takes care of this kind of knowledge, and the masters themselves will lead a political life or will seek for wisdom. Here you have the simple alternative: the truly human life is either political life or the life of quest for wisdom: "philosophy" in Greek, an alternative to which we shall have to come back more than once.

Now the next great theme, also belonging to economics, is that part which has to do not with human beings, in particular slaves, but with other kinds of property. And here the greatest question is the relation of moneymaking to management of the household. Aristotle asserts that they are two entirely different things. The[27] distinction between moneymaking and management of the household is based on a distinction between the natural forms of property, of acquisition or possession, and those which are not natural. The natural ones are essentially limited by what a man and his family can reasonably use. The art of acquiring money is essentially unlimited, and therefore there is something wrong with it, that a finite being should seek for infinite money. And among the natural

[xviii] *Politics* 1.1255b16–22. Presumably Strauss's translation.

forms of acquisition, the most important is agriculture. Agriculture has a much higher status, according to Aristotle and according to Plato, than commerce, industry, and especially, which is the lowest, the lending of interest, which from Aristotle's point of view is altogether unjust or immoral.

Now we do not have to go into the details of Aristotle's economic teaching, his teaching regarding the natural and the unnatural forms of acquisition. [Some of these] points[28] have a direct importance, and I will mention only one point. The distinction which Marx makes with particular clarity between use-value and exchange-value is literally taken from Aristotle. Marx makes of course a very different use for it, and naturally, because for Marx the fundamental phenomenon in the sphere of economics is production, which is not so in Aristotle. For Aristotle, the fundamental thing is the purpose of use—or if you look at the other side, the gifts of nature rather than that which exists by means of human production. Into this I cannot go. The main point which is so striking here as elsewhere is the orientation by what is natural and not natural. Without it one cannot understand anything of Aristotle's teachings at any point. There is a natural way of earning a livelihood and an unnatural [one], and the criterion is, for example, whether it is determined, whether it has limits, or whether it is unlimited. What is natural is necessarily limited, has a specific character. Nature means primarily the nature of a particular kind of things, whether they are men or dogs or horses, i.e., things distinguished from others, separate from the others, having a limit with a view to others. The unlimited is from this point of view not natural. After having gone through the economic question, of which the issue of slavery is a primary and in a way the most important part, Aristotle turns in the second book to a new subject.

We have learned in our way that the *polis* is natural, its parts are natural, that there is a natural slavery, there is a natural way of acquiring property. And now we turn to the *polis*, but in which sense? Book 2 begins as follows:

"Since we have the intention to contemplate regarding the political association, which is the best of all, for those who can live to the highest degree as they would wish, we must consider also the other forms of government, which some of the cities use, those cities which are reputed to be well-administered, and if there should be any others, which have been said (pronounced) by some people, and which have the reputation of being good, so that we will see what is correct and useful in them and what is not."[xix]

And so on. Now Aristotle turns then here to the question of the best form of government (I will leave it at this provisional translation of the Greek word *politeia*). But before he turns to this question, he looks at what we can learn from what others present us: [29][first], cities which are reputed to be admirable; second, blueprints of cities which are reputed to be admirable. You see, Aristotle proceeds in a strictly commonsensical way. He finds his bearings by reputation, assuming that reputation is never entirely unfounded, surely not in reasonably free societies, and therefore it is of some help. But the strange thing is—for us it is strange—that he treats the commonwealth, or the political orders which exist in fact, say, in Sparta, in the same way in which he treats, say, Plato's *Republic*. In other words,

[xix] *Politics* 2.1260b27–33. Presumably Strauss's translation.

whether this is an actual or a blueprinted order does not make any difference for Aristotle. This is quite remarkable. The procedure is, incidentally, not historical; he begins the discussion of these various regimes with Plato's proposals in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, then takes up the proposals by some earlier thinkers, and only then he turns to the actual orders which have a good reputation, such as Sparta. Characteristically, not Athens: Athens is, among the people whom Aristotle addresses, not reputed to be a good polity, therefore it is treated with silence. We will discuss this next time.

Now among the discussions of the second book, the criticism of Plato is of course most important, because Aristotle does here something which he did not do in book 1, namely, show that the household—the family, as we can also say—is necessary. He only showed that the *polis* is superior [to], is essentially different from, and broader and more comprehensive than the family. But he did consider the possibility that there might be a family-less, a household-less *polis*, which theoretically is possible: that is exactly what Plato does in the *Republic*.[xx] So in the criticism of Plato's *Republic* he shows why the household, and private property, and private family are necessary. And this is one very important point which Aristotle makes in book 2, and the other is his discussion of the earliest political philosopher, as we can call him, Hippodamus, which you will also find there, and I think it would be helpful if you could have read it next Wednesday. That will facilitate the discussion. Now we have a minute or so left. Is there any point—yes?

Student: [xxi]I'm not sure exactly why Aristotle thinks that moneymaking is unlimited . . . energy and cleverness of a man, and conventionally, by the nature of the business, by laws—

LS: No, but a man has, say, acquired a hundred thousand dollars. There is nothing in the nature of the case, [30]as far as the economic situation is concerned, against his making, if he can, a million dollars, a billion dollars, and so on and so on. But[31] if you do not absolutize money, if you look at the whole context—and the whole context is human use, use of the property by the property owner—then you arrive at limits. Unless you can say: Well, instead of accumulating money, he will go in for ever more luxury; he will have fifty yachts, and twenty country houses, and fifty whatever you do. But Aristotle would say [that] if you look at it again concretely from the point of view of use, of good use, of virtuous use, which would not [32]exclude showing off, mere conspicuous consumption, as well as stinginess, of course, then you would see you cannot go beyond a certain point, that it is in itself limited. This is what he means. That you can accumulate as many houses, or pieces of land, or diamonds in the same way in which you can accumulate dollar bills, Aristotle knew (although he didn't know of paper money), but he thinks simply that money is a very great convenience but it has the temptation in it to make us forget what it is for, that it is only a convenience. And this is a good example of what the ancients meant by mere convention. A mere convention is a convenience, but a convenience which somehow pretends to be independent and therefore as it were runs away from us. [33]Is this not clear? Mr. Levy?

[xx] *Republic*, book 5.

[xxi] This speaker is incorrectly identified in the transcript as Mr. Levy.

Mr. Levy: For Hobbes, the prepolitical state is one of war. What was the prepolitical state or way of life of men, as Aristotle saw it? And also, why was the prepolitical state insufficient . . . ?

LS: Well, have you ever lived in a village?

Mr. Levy: Yes.

LS: Not Greenwich Village. [Great laughter] Well, then you see there are certain things which you cannot easily get there. The chances that you would meet there someone with whom you can talk about the things which interest you are smaller than in a larger [society]. Your natural needs, the needs of your mind, cannot be so easily fulfilled. And you must not forget, of course, that any village in this country, or for that matter in Europe, is a part of a larger whole and therefore not—you know? Disregarding that entirely. Yes?

Mr. Levy: On the second point . . . in reply one could say, in Aristotle's own terms, forgetting about the present company, the many have no regard for the mind because only force . . .

LS: Yes, well, as Aristotle says in the first book of the *Politics*, if we want to find out what is natural, we must look at the healthy, and in this sense normal members of the species and not at those who are in one way or the other corrupt or deficient. That there are people who are perfectly happy without any cultivation of their mind is undeniable, but there is something wrong with them.

Mr. Levy: What you're saying is—

LS: They are—we call them sometimes dumb and other terms of this kind, which you doubtless know as well as I do. And we cannot take our bearings by them. We should not despise them, but we cannot take our bearings by them; and if they can be satisfied in a very dull community, that doesn't mean that we should be satisfied with that.

Mr. Levy: So what you're saying is that two students of political philosophy who lived in two different villages and wanted to go off and get married would make a city?

LS: Well, no, Aristotle would say if it is truly a village and not a part of a *polis*, then there will not be any students of philosophy.

Mr. Levy: Ah, well, where did the city come from? Who *knew* to make a city?

LS: How will it come about? Well,[34] there are two ways of understanding that. That there is a kind of need, say, common defense—I mean one of these crude needs which everyone can understand—and then some villages settle together, and out of this a *polis* comes into being. And then once the *polis* is there, there is at least a chance for the higher things to develop. As Aristotle puts it, the *polis* comes into being for the sake of life, i.e.,

of mere life—self-defense and so on—but it *is* for the sake of living *well*.[xxii] Living well, not in the sense of what a glutton understands by living well, but living nobly. Now whether[35] this settling together of the city presupposes men of the greatest stature, surpassing the greatest philosophers, the founders, that is a long question, you know, say a man like Theseus, the mythical founder of Athens. That is a long question. According to the popular view, of course, he was a hero, *hērōs*, and not merely a philosopher. Whether Aristotle would accept that is a long question.

Mr. Levy: You mention civil defense. Was there generally war going on in the prepolitical world, for Aristotle?

LS: I beg your pardon?

Mr. Levy: Was generally war going on in the world prepolitically according to Aristotle? In the *prepolitical* world—

LS: I suppose both. There are peaceable and non-peaceable people, and also communities. *Ça dépend*. There can be war, there will also be peace, that would not be the point. But people can defend themselves better by settling together and living together. Good. Well, then—

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[1] Deleted "that."
[2] Deleted "there are."
[3] Deleted "to."
[4] Deleted "one."
[5] Deleted "Hobbes identifies."
[6] Deleted "'This is.'"
[7] Deleted "happiness."
[8] Deleted "the last point which I made." Moved "which I made."
[9] Deleted "If."
[10] Deleted "has."
[11] Deleted "and"
[12] Deleted "And this leads."
[13] Deleted "is that."
[14] Deleted "Since"
[15] Moved "by a speaker."
[16] Deleted "them."
[17] Moved "here."
[18] Deleted "is"
[19] Deleted "state the exclusion"
[20] Deleted "therefore."
[21] Deleted "old"
[22] Deleted "because."
[23] Deleted "is reminded"
[24] Deleted "in order to show"
[25] Deleted "also"
[26] Deleted "the Caliban."
[27] Deleted "distinction is based—the."
[28] Deleted "which have—some of which." Moved "some of which."
[29] Deleted "(a)"

[xxii] *Politics* 1.1252b29–30.

[30] Deleted “which would speak against, the nature of the case”
[31] Deleted “if you look at it from the point of view.”
[32] Deleted “be which would”
[33] Deleted “this is what’
[34] Deleted “strictly speaking.”
[35] Deleted “this presupposes.”

Session 11: no date[i]

Aristotle, *Politics*, books 1-3

Leo Strauss: [In progress] —theoretical knowledge of one kind or another in modern times. Needless to say, in present-day positivistic political science, there is such a mediation through positivistically-understood science; and therefore an external sign, the importance of a technical vocabulary, something wholly alien to classical political philosophy.

We turn then to the study of Aristotle's *Politics*, to the first book, and there we see the importance rather of the first consideration, of the difference between *physis* (nature) and *nomos*, and then their direct relation to political life. How does this come [about]? Aristotle takes issue there with Plato's assertion that the city and household differ only quantitatively, not qualitatively. In other words, he defends the dignity of the city against an attempt to reduce the city, as it were, to the same status as the household. Furthermore, Aristotle takes issue with those who assert that slavery is only conventional. Here again he defends what he regards as a basic institution of the city. Now this defensive character of the argument is connected with a fundamental problem, which we may state as follows. The whole sphere of political life, or of political understanding, is attacked on theoretical grounds, i.e., on grounds which are outside political life itself, and therefore political life and political understanding is in need of a theoretical defense. To take a present-day example: a defense of political prudence, of the particular ways of understanding peculiar to political life, this is today endangered by Marxism, by the assumed knowledge of the character of the whole historical process. You cannot simply argue prudentially, practically, against Marxism: the defense of the sphere of prudence must be theoretical because the attack is theoretical. Now the concept of *physis*, of nature, especially in contradistinction to art, is of course at home in pretheoretical, prephilosophic life. But the distinction between *physis* and *nomos*, which plays such a great role in the discussion of theory, arises in theoretical reflection and therefore this goes beyond the realm of prephilosophic understanding. Is this point clear? I will try to restate it.

Aristotle, in contradistinction to modern thought but in particular also to Plato, assumes that the political-moral sphere has a certain independence of all studies of a physical or metaphysical nature, the reason being that the standards in the light of which we judge morally and politically are accessible directly, without any theoretical deduction. We know in a sufficient manner what moderation, magnanimity, and these other things are. Aristotle does not even make the attempt to deduce these various virtues from something more fundamental, as Plato does in the *Republic*, where he tries to show there are these and these virtues and only these virtues, with a view to the fact that the soul has these parts and order. Aristotle doesn't do that. He doesn't give a theoretical deduction; he simply takes for granted that properly-bred men know these virtues from their training,

[i] In the original transcript, the order of sessions 11 and 12 was reversed.

from their life, and what Aristotle does is he spells out what every gentleman would know as a matter of course. Now this sphere, the ceiling of which is the understanding of the noble and the just, of the virtues, is not in need of being deduced from higher principles or in need of being theoretically justified. But if this whole sphere of practice, of prudence, is as such attacked, then it becomes necessary to defend it. And the attack will of course be theoretical, and the defense will be theoretical. You seem to have some . . .

Student: Well, can you really say, if in fact it turns out that prudence needs to be defended on theoretical grounds from these theoretical attacks, that ordinary men, who have certain opinions of virtues, *know* them? Or can you only say that they have true opinion about them but that they really don't know?

LS: Yes, but that would be in the main sufficient—true opinion.

Same student: But it's only sufficient for practical purposes; they really don't know these the way they . . .

LS: But this is a very great question, whether they cease to be more than true opinions within the context of Aristotle's *Ethics*, because this would require a theoretical deduction. [1]The fundamental difficulty can be stated as follows. If you try to deduce morality from something higher, then you believe you can answer the question: Why should men be decent? But from the point of view of the decent man, the question must never arise. Now Plato of course discusses this question. That is the meaning of this famous argument of Socrates against people like Thrasymachus in the *Republic* and Callicles in the *Gorgias*: that here are people, more or less clever, who refuse to acknowledge the ordinary principles of decency, and Socrates is therefore compelled to defend them. But such a defense you will seek in vain in Aristotle's *Ethics*. Surely not in the fundamental part, the first five or six books.

Now Aristotle, I said, looks at the *polis* in the light of nature. "Nature" means here something different[2] [from] the totality of phenomena. "Nature" is here used as a term of distinction, namely, in contradistinction to art and *nomos*. "Nature" is understood in the way in which we found it understood in the passage of the tenth book of the *Odyssey*, which I read to you:[ii] "nature" is a term susceptible of being used in the plural. There are *natures*. Each kind of thing, say, man or dog or horse, has *its* nature. The nature of man is something radically different from the oak tree, for example. And furthermore, it is implied and is stated by Aristotle explicitly [that] the nature of a thing is the end, *telos*. For the nature of a thing is as a thing is when its coming-into-being *has been completed*. Completed: the word in Greek is derived from the noun *telos*. Therefore the *polis*'s naturalness is emphatically human association in its completed form. Nature is here understood as it shows itself in living beings most clearly: we have a beginning, seed; toward a peak; and then decay. But the end is the peak; in other words, the end does not mean the sense in which death is the end of human life.

[ii] See session 9.

Just as there is a nature of a horse, there is a nature of man. That which makes man *man*, which determines the nature of man, is *logos*, speech or reason. Hence the perfection of man is above all the perfection of his speech or reason, more so than the perfection of his body, although that is also important. Man has a variety of such perfections, and this is one of the most striking differences between man and the brutes, a variety of excellences or virtues. The most important here is a distinction between practical and theoretical wisdom. There is a great difference among men in regard to reasoning, and these differences are due not only to differences in training and exercise but also to nature. There are, as the classics say, good natures and bad natures. That doesn't mean good-natured and bad-natured people, but gifted and non-gifted people. We notice [this] even today when people speak of IQ's, which is one part of this story, but also something else which is not considered an IQ: if someone has by nature a very small power over his desires—for example, if he is what is called "oversexed"—this is also part of a bad nature from this point of view. So a well-tempered mixture of the temperaments is also important, and in a way more important than the mere IQ. Now once we understand this difference of natures, we see what the difference regarding the natural slave is. This is the extreme case, the flooring as it were: a human being who is as strong and as stupid as an ox. But still he is not quite as stupid, because otherwise he would be unable to understand "one, two, three, four," which obviously the ox cannot understand.

Now Aristotle turns in the second half of the first book to the investigation of property and wealth, also from the point of view of nature. True wealth is wealth according to nature.[3] True wealth consists of things which by their nature are capable of being used for what they are: food, for example, in contradistinction to money, as one sees clearly in times of scarcity or especially of famine, when you cannot eat the money but you can eat the food. Now let us see here a remark of Aristotle:

"Of every piece of property there is a twofold use; and both uses belong essentially to the thing, but not in the same manner. For the one use is peculiar to the thing concerned, and the other is not. For example a shoe: you can use it for wearing it, and you can use it for bartering it or selling it. For both are uses of the shoe. Because even the man who gives the shoe to somebody else for money or for food uses the shoe as shoe, because the other man, the buyer, wants to have a shoe and not something else. But this bartering is not the proper use of it; for the shoe has not come into being for the sake of exchange."[iii]

This is the distinction between use-value and exchange-value which has[4] [been made] so famous by Karl Marx. But what is the difference for Marx? Let us see what Aristotle says about that.

"Property of this kind[iv] i.e., for the purpose of subsistence[v] is evidently given by nature to all living beings, from the instant of their first birth to the days that their growth is finished. There are animals which, when their offspring is born, bring forth along with it food enough to support it until the animal can provide for itself: this is the case with

[iii] *Politics* 1.1257a6–13. Presumably Strauss's translation.
[iv] In Barker: "order."
[v] In Barker: "[that is to say, for the purpose of subsistence]."

insects which reproduce themselves by grubs, and of animals which do so by eggs. Animals which are viviparous have food for their offspring in themselves, for a certain time, of the nature of what is called milk.

"If it is evident that there is such a natural provision for food for growth from birth (i.e., by nature),[vi] it is equally evident that we must believe that similar provision is made for adults. Plants exist to give subsistence to animals, and animals to give subsistence[vii] to men. Animals, when they are domesticated, serve for use as well as for food; wild animals, too, in most cases if not in all, serve to furnish man not only with food, but also with other comforts, such as[viii] clothing and similar aids to life. Accordingly, as nature makes nothing purposeless or in vain, all the aforesaid[ix] animals must have been made by nature for the sake of men."[x]

That is the passage I had in mind.

Now what can this tell us about the difference between Marx and Aristotle? According to Aristotle, the origin of true wealth is nature: nature supplies these things to us, which we modify, naturally, but the origin is nature. What is the Marxist view? Not only the Marxist view, Marx only radicalized it; the very clear statement, much prior to Marx, is Locke's: the origin of all wealth is *labor*. And Locke makes clear the implication of that: nature supplies us only with the almost worthless materials. We cannot deny that we need some gifts of nature, but they are so to speak nothing: they are almost worthless materials.[xi] In other words, according to that Lockean–Marxian view, the origin of true wealth is human production. This is not a doctrine limited to the sphere of property but [one which] has universal significance. From the Aristotelian point of view, knowledge is the adequation of the intellect to the thing to be understood, i.e., knowledge is fundamentally receptive, dependent. According to the modern view knowledge is something like organization of sense data. Knowledge is fundamentally constructive, not receptive. In other words, there is a strict parallel here to what we have observed regarding wealth.

Now you see[5] also in this passage that here "nature" is used in the singular. It is the same nature which supplies food to men, beasts, etc. Nature is the source of everything which is not made by man.[6] In order to bring out the relation between "nature" understood in the plural and "nature" in the singular, you may say nature is the source of the natures. Now in this passage which I read to you—this is a most striking and extraordinary passage—nature is presented as very friendly to man. Aristotle seems to express a very optimistic view, a naively optimistic view. Let us leave it at this appearance for the moment and

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[vi] Barker indicates that these words are an interpolation: "[If it is evident that there is thus a natural provision for food at birth, and during growth]." The clarification "i.e., by nature" is not in Barker.
[vii] Barker has "it" in the place of this occurrence of "subsistence."
[viii] Barker's "the provision of" is omitted.
[ix] The reader here inserts into Barker's text "the aforesaid."
[x] *Politics* 1.1256b7–22. Barker's translation.
[xi] Locke, *Second Treatise*, chap. 5, sec. 43.

consider only the modern alternative, which is beautifully expressed in the very frequently used phrase "conquest of nature." You don't conquer something kind to you. Nature is here understood as enemy by implication. The difficulty which is faced by the modern view of course is that the fact that man can conquer nature, that he has this in himself, he does not owe to himself, but to nature: that he is so equipped, if only with a potentiality, that he can become the master and owner of nature, in the words of Descartes.

Now if we look at the [first][xii] book of the *Politics* as a whole and the selection of the themes therein, we find first the proof that the *polis* is by nature, that is to say that the *polis* is a natural perfection of the natural associations, of the associations which are parts of the *polis*; and the most important of these parts is the family or household. And secondly, we find a discussion of the household—very reasonably, because it is the most important part of the city. In the household as Aristotle understands it three associations are united: male–female or husband–wife association; parent–children association; and the master–slave association. But only slavery is discussed here in the first book, the reason being that any relevant details regarding the parent–child and husband–wife relation depend on the peculiar character of the political society; say in a stern, Puritan society, these relations differ very much from what they would be in a very permissive society. So you have to consider the society within which they occur, whereas the master-slave relation is relatively independent of this whole as Aristotle implies.

Aristotle discusses there also the art or skill of acquisition, and especially the acquisition of money. In the first book he shows that the family needs the city, that it is incomplete without the city. But this leads to a new question: What is the other way around? Once you have this city, a society large enough to defend itself, do you still need the family, the smaller association? This is the issue of communism, in the way in which it is a concern to Aristotle, and is taken up by Aristotle in the second book.

The second book is devoted to the examination of those political associations or communities which were regarded as being outstanding. For the fact that the city is natural does not mean, of course, that every city is in every respect according to nature. This is true even of a horse; a horse is a natural being but it may be crippled by disease or by accident. So not every natural being is in every respect according to nature, and therefore we have to find out precisely what would be a city which is in every respect according to nature, according to the nature of the city. Aristotle pays equal attention to those which are famous and reputed to be good, and to those which are, as he puts it, "merely written" or, as we would call it, blueprinted. You see how little Aristotle is "quote a realist" in the colloquial sense of the term. And the reason is [that] it is by no means certain that any actual political order is simply good, therefore we have also to consider the blueprinted ones. Maybe they are superior in one respect or another.

Now Aristotle has however a special reason for the examination of the available political orders, and this he states at the beginning: "We will engage in this examination in order to see what is correct and useful of the various institutions, and furthermore to avoid the

[xii] The transcript has "third," which is clearly an error.

impression that we are trying to show off our wisdom by presenting some other proposal."[xiii] By showing that the now-available political orders in fact or in blueprint are not good enough, Aristotle justifies[7] [engaging] in an investigation of his own. He excuses himself for his work, a thing which he does not do in his other writings. For example, when he begins to set forth his physics, where he discusses also the views of other people, he does not go on with fear that he might be misunderstood as someone who will show off his wisdom. The appearance of ambition, of the desire to show off, is more likely from Aristotle's point of view in political matters than in other matters. Among purely theoretical men—this is the tacit assumption of Aristotle—this motive is not so powerful as in a sphere which at least borders on the marketplace.

Now the question guiding Aristotle's examination of the available, reputedly good associations is this: Does political association mean a community of everything or only of some things? Of course it cannot be communion in nothing, being a community. Now the maximum which is possible would be the community of women, children, and property. There could not possibly be a community of bodies. It is absolutely impossible to socialize a toothache or any other bodily affection; this is by nature private and can never be collectivized. But things which are not as much one's own, as he puts it—things like women, wives, children, and property—can be collectivized. Now this of course is a proposal made in Plato's *Republic* by Socrates, and it is the first theme of Aristotle's criticism. The reason why Socrates tries to socialize or collectivize everything—going much, of course, beyond present-day communism—is that the city should be one to the greatest possible degree. Aristotle questions this attempt because a certain multiplicity is essential to the *polis*: if one makes it one too much, it will no longer be a city. The city[8] is by nature a multitude, and this means there is an absolute limit to unification. The city consists not only of many human beings, which no one denies, but of essentially different human beings, and different members of the political association fulfill different functions. If they all had the same function, it would no longer be a *polis*. This of course is admitted by Plato. As you know, in Plato's *Republic* everyone is supposed to have an art, and accordingly there is a great variety of arts. The criterion for the goodness of a city is not according to Aristotle unity in any way, but self-sufficiency. More particularly, Aristotle objects to communism on the grounds that, as experience shows, common things are neglected. Everyone will think that somebody else will take care of it. In other words, there will be no individual responsibility. The trust that "George will do it" will lead to no one doing it. Or in regard to the family, to be the son of all citizens, as in Plato's *Republic* the children will be, means to be no one's son. The affection, friendship, of parents and children which becomes so universal becomes very watery, as Aristotle puts it, to say nothing of the fact that the communistic scheme as developed by Socrates wouldn't work, because people will recognize their own children and then it will be impossible to maintain the universal relation.

Now it is unnecessary and unimportant to discuss all the Aristotelian arguments here, so I select some which are particularly characteristic. Now let me see.

[xiii] *Politics* 2.1260b32–34. Presumably Strauss's translation.

"There are also other difficulties regarding a community of wives and children,[xiv] which its advocates will not find it easy to meet by any precautions. We may take for example a case of assault, unintentional or intentional homicide, fighting, and slander.[xv] All these offenses, when they are committed against father or mother or a near relative, differ from offenses against human beings who are not so related, in being breaches of[xvi] piety. Such offenses must happen more frequently when men are ignorant of their relatives than when they know who they are; and when they do happen, the customary penance can be made when men know their relatives, but none can be made when they do not.[xvii] It is also surprising that Plato, after having made all the younger[xviii] men of the *polis*[xix] the common sons of the[xx] citizens, should content himself with debarring older men who are "lovers" of the young from carnal intercourse with them, and should not debar them from behaving as "lovers" or practicing other familiarities. Such familiarities, if practiced between son and father, or brother and brother, are the very height of indecency, all the more as the mere cherishing of this form of love, without giving it actual expression, is in itself indecent."[xxi]

Now this is a very characteristic argument of Aristotle: he appeals here to the accepted notion of decency without in any way making an attempt to *prove*[9] to people these sound notions. In connection with what I said before about the fact that decency and its specific meaning in various respects, [this] is simply taken for granted and not deduced by Aristotle.

To come to a broader argument: what makes men care for other men to the highest degree is the private—one's own—and preciousness. But these two conditions will not be fulfilled if women and children are in common: they will be no *one's* wives or children, and since there are innumerable females who are called his wives and innumerable children who are called his children, they lack the quality of preciousness. Aristotle also refers to a great difficulty in Plato's *Republic*, namely, that the gifted children of the lower class will be transferred to the upper class, and they of course would know their natural parents and might even become attached to them, because[10] [it] is not recognizable at the moment of their birth whether they have a high IQ or other important qualities or not.

Regarding property, Aristotle points out the great nuisances which result if men have everything in common. He refers to the experiences of fellow-travelers (not in the metaphorical sense, of course, but in the simple sense): the collisions with one another on

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[xiv] In Barker: "There are also other difficulties in a system of community of wives and children."
[xv] The exact wording in Barker: "We may take as examples cases of assault, unintentional (and, we may also add, intentional) homicide, fighting, and slander."
[xvi] Here the reader omits "natural."
[xvii] Barker's exact rendering of the phrase: "and when they do happen, the customary penance can be made if men know their relatives, but none can be made if they are ignorant of them."
[xviii] In Barker: "young."
[xix] In Barker: "state."
[xx] Barker here inserts "older."
[xxi] *Politics* 2.1262a25–37.

trifling matters when you are in a small space and together all the time. So without private property, without a private sphere, human life would be absolutely unbearable. But there is something true in communism which however cannot be brought about by communism, namely, that what belongs to friends is absolutely common. In other words, this precisely means that everyone has his own which he shares with his friends.

Now let us see . . .

"It is clear from what has been said that the better system is that under which property is privately owned but is put to common use; and the function proper to the legislator is to make men so disposed, to educate them in such a manner, that they will treat property in this way.

"There is a further consideration, namely that of pleasure: here too to think of a thing as your own makes an unsayable difference.[xxii] The satisfaction of a natural feeling brings pleasure;[xxiii] and it may well be that regard for oneself, or self-love, and by extension, for what is one's own[xxiv] is a feeling implanted by nature, and not a mere[xxv] impulse. Self-love is rightly censured, but what is truly[xxvi] censured is not so much love of oneself as excessive love of oneself—[xxvii] just as we also blame the lover of money not so much for loving money as for loving it in excess;[xxviii] the simple feeling of love for any of these things[xxix] is more or less universal. We may add that a very great pleasure is to be found in doing an act of kindness, in giving help to friends or guests or comrades;[xxx] and such kindness and help become possible only when property is privately owned. But not only are these pleasures[xxxi] impossible under a system of excessive unification of the city. The activities of two forms of virtue are also obviously destroyed. The first of these is temperance in the matter of sexual relations (it is an act of decency and virtue to refrain from loving the wife of another): and the second is liberality in the use of property."[xxxii]

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xxi: In Barker: "There is a further consideration which must be taken into account. This is the consideration of pleasure. Here too [as well as in the matter of goodness] to think of a thing as your own makes an inexpressible difference."

[xxiii] Barker indicates that "[The satisfaction of a natural feeling brings pleasure]" is interpolated.

[xxiv] In Barker "[and, by extension, for what is one's own]" is an interpolation.

[xxv] The insertion of "random" occurs here in Barker.

[xxvi] In the place of "truly" Barker writes "really."

[xxvii] Barker uses the phrase "love of oneself in excess."

[xxviii] Barker indicates interpolation of "[not so much for loving money as for loving it in excess]."

[xxix] The reader omits Barker's interpolation "[self, or property, or money]."

[xxx] The phrase is worded so in Barker: "We may add that a very great pleasure is to be found in doing a kindness and giving some help to friends, or guests, or comrades."

[xxxi] Here Barker inserts the interpolation "[that arising from the satisfaction of a natural feeling of self-love, and that arising from the satisfaction of our impulse to help others]."

[xxxii] Barker specifies his rendering of the two kinds of virtuous activity so: "The first of these is temperance in the matter of sexual relations (it is an act of moral value to refrain from loving the wife of another in the strength of temperance): the second is liberality in the use of property." *Politics* 2.1263a37–b11.

So you see here the kind of argument. We know by virtue of being properly brought up that temperance and self-control on the one hand, and liberality on the other are virtues. The practice of these virtues becomes impossible if there is no private property and if there is no privacy of wives, and therefore communism contradicts the fundamental requirements of morality.

Now what is the overall impression which Aristotle has of Plato's *Republic*? He is very much impressed by the attractiveness of the *Republic*. I believe for quite a few modern readers, whatever they may think about the wisdom of the proposition, it is attractive. What is the secret of that attractiveness according to Aristotle? If I could elicit from you a reaction, what you find attractive in the *Republic*, it would be quite helpful and illuminating . . . But I expected not to get an answer. [Laughter]

Aristotle says that this arrangement as suggested by Socrates in the *Republic* is "beautiful to look at," and "the hearer accepts it gladly." Why? Because he thinks "there will be a wonderful friendship toward all human beings in such a society. Especially when someone criticizes things as they are now, and says they are so bad now because of the lack of the community of property, meaning lawsuits and false witnesses, and flattery of the rich." All these kinds of things which we have in our society and all societies which ever were, they will be absent from such a society. But Aristotle says these vices, these things which are truly ugly, "are caused not by the absence of community of property, but by human wickedness." Therefore the way of curing these ills, to the extent that they can be cured, is good upbringing and not communism.

Aristotle gives an additional reason against Plato's *Republic*. He says: "if these proposals were sound, then people would have become aware of them before. Because everything has been discovered already, in a manner, but some of the things have not been brought together, and others, things which are known, in fact are not used."[xxxiii] So you see the claim to novelty which Aristotle can raise: that he may be able to bring together institutions which have hitherto not been brought together. But he denies that there are any institutions which as such have not become known. Aristotle does not say that everything that is, is reasonable. But he says what is reasonable is somehow known, which is obviously not the same.

Finally, he gives the following broad argument. The recommendation of the scheme of the *Republic* is that it contributes most to the happiness of the citizens. Then somewhere in the *Republic* the question is raised: Who is happy there? The answer is, roughly: Well, no one in particular, but the city as a whole.[xxxiv] Aristotle says: Well, happiness is not of the nature of such things as odd numbers or, for that matter, even numbers.[xxxv] You can easily get an even number by adding two odd numbers; you cannot get a happy society by adding together unhappy individuals. So this much about . . . This only shows again the crucial importance of the individual and his satisfaction, which is the argument of Aristotle against Plato's communism. Aristotle does not speak of the right of individuals;

[xxxiii] 2.1263b15–23, 1264a1–5. Presumably Strauss's translation.
[xxxiv] *Rep.* 419a–421c; see also 466a, 519e–520a.
[xxxv] At *Politics* 2.1264b15 ff.

one could say [that] on the one hand he speaks of the responsibility of the citizen, of the good man, of the virtue of the individual, and on the other hand of the pleasures which the individual needs for feeling well. The concept of right in our sense is absent from here.

We now turn to a discussion of another blueprint which is the most important of these, apart from the Platonic ones, which Aristotle discusses. I will begin to read it. This is the scheme of a man called Hippodamus. [LS writes on the blackboard] You may not have heard his name; almost nothing is known of him except what Aristotle tells us here in the second book of the *Politics*. But he is nevertheless obviously not a great man, as you will soon see, but a remarkable man. Now what does Aristotle tell us about him? He begins as follows.

"Hippodamus the son of Euryphon, citizen of Miletus, was the first man without having engaged in politics, who attempted to handle the theme of the best constitution. [xxxvi] He was a man who invented the planning of towns in separate quarters, and laid out the Peiraeus with regular roads. In his general life, too,[xxxvii] he was led into some eccentricity by a desire to attract attention; and this made a number of people feel that he lived in too studied and overdone[xxxviii] a manner. He wore his hair long and expensively adorned: he had flowing robes, expensively decorated, made from a cheap but warm material [laughter], which he wore in summer time as well as in winter; and he aspired to be learned about nature generally."[xxxix]

Now this is not Aristotle's way of speaking about other people. That sounds like rather malicious gossip. [Laughter] So he must have another reason. For example, when he discussed Plato or Socrates, he said something about the Socratic speeches, their peculiar charm, attractiveness, and gracefulness. And he said: Well, it is too much to expect that in addition they should be *true*![xl] That is obviously something quite different.

In order to understand, [to] appreciate fully this remark, we must give proper weight to what Aristotle said: that he was the first man not engaged in politics who attempted to discuss the best political order. A man not engaged in politics who attempts to discuss the best political order: one can say that is Aristotle's definition of the political philosopher. Therefore, we can say Hippodamus was the first political philosopher. But what a terrible thing, that the first political philosopher cut such an atrocious figure. That has something to do with this problematic character of politics, to which we have already alluded and to which we will come back very soon. Now a scheme of Hippodamus, with which I will not bore you, consists of dividing everything—citizen body, laws, etc.—into three. The

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[xxxvi] This reading differs slightly from Barker's translation: "Hippodamus the son of Euryphon, a citizen of Miletus, was the first man without practical experience of politics who attempted to handle the theme of the best form of constitution."
[xxxvii] Barker inserts here the interpolation "[apart from these innovations]."
[xxxviii] The reader substitutes "overdone" for "artificial."
[xxxix] Barker concludes this statement with the interpolation "[as well as about town-planning]," *Politics* 2.1267b22–30.
[xl] *Politics* 2.1265a10 ff.

number three is apparently supplied by a certain philosophy of nature on which he drew. The consequence is of course that everything is very simple and clear: everywhere you find three. But as Aristotle makes tacitly clear precisely for this reason, because of its extreme simplicity, very great confusion follows. That is to say, Hippodamus doesn't give attention to what is peculiar to the political, that this doesn't have the clarity and simplicity which the starred heaven, at least to the unarmed eye, possesses. In other words, no understanding of the fact that the political is in a class by itself and cannot be interpreted on the basis of concepts supplied by science dealing with the subhuman.

There is one proposal of Hippodamus which is especially important for Aristotle, one among many, only Aristotle thinks that it is crucial. Hippodamus proposed that those who invent something useful for the city would receive some honor. Well, we take this for granted, that it is a wise practice, but for Aristotle that is questionable. Aristotle discusses this proposal at great length, because this proposal, which seems to be trivial, goes in his opinion to the root of things. I read to you:

"In regard to the further question raised by Hippodamus—whether some honor ought not to be conferred on those who suggest an improvement which is of benefit to the city—we may argue that legislation in such a sense cannot be safely enacted, and has only a specious sound. It might encourage false accusations[xli] against the reformers, and perhaps lead[xlii] to political disturbances. But the proposal also involves another problem, and suggests a further argument. There are some thinkers who raise a doubt whether states lose or gain by changing their traditional laws when some other and better law is possible. If, on this issue, we take the line that change is *not* a gain, it is difficult to agree readily with the proposal made by Hippodamus; for changes which are in fact[xliii] subversive of the laws, or of the whole political order,[xliv] may be proposed on the plea that they tend to the common good. However, as the issue has now been mentioned, it will be as well to define our views about it a little further. It is, as we have said, an issue which we can debate;[xlv] and a case can be made for the view that change is the better policy. Certainly in other branches of knowledge change has proved beneficial. We may cite in evidence the changes from traditional practice which have been made in medicine, in physical training, and generally in all the arts and forms of human skill; and since politics has to be counted as an art or form of human[xlvi] skill, it can be reasonably argued[xlvii] that the same must[xlviii] be true of politics. It can also be argued that the actual facts[xlix] provide an indication of the benefits of change.[l] The usages of old times were

[xli] Barker interpolates here "of revolutionary plans."
[xlii] Here Barker inserts "in this way."
[xliii] Barker puts "really" in the place of "in fact."
[xliv] In the place of "the whole political order" Barker writes "the constitution."
[xlv] In Barker: "which is in debate."
[xlvi] The repetition of "human" is not in Barker.
[xlvii] In Barker: "it can be argued logically."
[xlviii] Barker inserts here "also"
[xlix] Barker interpolates "[of history]."
[l] Barker presents as an interpolation "[of the benefits of change]."

exceedingly simple and uncivilized: Greeks went about armed, and bought their brides from each other. [Imagine—LS]

"Indeed the relics of ancient customs which are still in existence, here and there, are utterly absurd: there is, for example, a law at Cyme, relating to homicide, that if an accuser can produce a definite number of witnesses from his own kinsmen, the[li] accused shall be liable to the charge of murder. [Laughter] All men, as a rule, seek to follow, not the ancestral, but the good;[lii] and the earliest known human beings, whether they were "earth-born," or survivors of some cataclysm, were in all probability similar to ordinary or even foolish people today.[liii] It would therefore be an absurdity always to stick to[liv] their notions."[lv]

I think I will leave it at that. What is the point which Aristotle makes? . . . Aristotle does not deny that in the arts, medicine, etc., progress has been made. On the contrary, in parallel passages you will find he has said that progress is of the essence of the arts. There are always greater refinements possible, and that is the law of an art or skill, to progress indefinitely. But the question is: Is what is true of the arts true of laws or politics? The first argument is: Why not?[11] Politics too is a form of art or skill. But the difficulties to which he alludes at the beginning, I must not forget. Technological changes, he will say, may very well lead to political changes; therefore you cannot simply approve of technological change, you must have your eyes open regarding possible political change. And if the political change is desirable change for the better, then all right; but if the political change is not a change for the better, then you have to wonder whether technological progress should be promoted. You have to take first the simpler view, the view held by Hippodamus: it is obviously sound to change laws because the laws stem from the olden time, from a time when men were less enlightened and less civilized than now, naturally. And especially the principle [that] we—all men—who know, who have any understanding, seek not the ancestral as ancestral, the traditional as traditional, but the good; and if there is a difference between the traditional or ancestral and the good, we will choose the good.

Now there is a connection between this view and Hippodamus's simple and clear proposal regarding the number three. As we easily can see, this phenomenon of Hippodamus has in a somewhat modified form renewed itself in modern times [in] a phenomenon called political radicalism. It has a different name in this country. I believe it is called liberalism. It is characterized by reliance on simple proposals and [the view that] what is true of technological change is also true of political change. Now after having stated the[12] [case] for Hippodamus and his life, he states the case for the other point of view, what we can call the conservative argument to the extent to which we can apply this notion to ancient discussions.

[li] Barker inserts here the word "person."
[lii] In Barker: "not the line of tradition, but some idea of the good."
[liii] The reader omits this parenthetical insertion: "(Indeed that is actually the tale that is told of the 'earth-born' men.)"
[liv] In Barker, not "always to stick to" but "to remain constant to."
[lv] *Politics* 2.1268b22–1269a8.

Now while these arguments go to show that in some cases and at some times law ought to be changed, there is another point of view from which it would appear that change is a matter which needs great caution. When we reflect that the improvements likely to be effected may be small, and that it is a bad thing to accustom men to abrogate laws lightly—[lvi] —to change the practice of an art is not the same as to change the practice of law. It is from habit, and only from habit, that law derives the validity which ensures obedience. But habit can be created only by the passage of time, and the readiness to change from actually existing to new laws will accordingly tend to weaken the general power of law.

This is not so easy for us to understand because in modern times generally, owing to the concept of the sovereign and sovereignty, lawmaking and quick changes of law have become more or less a matter of course. We need therefore some effort of imagination to understand the older point of view. The key point which Aristotle makes is, I think, directly intelligible: the analogy of art and law, of art and politics, of art and the *polis*, is questioned, because, while the arts owe their power to their evident reasonableness, [in] that this manipulation, this operation, is manifestly conducive to bring about the desired result, law owes its power to custom or habit *alone,* as Aristotle says here . . . not to its intrinsic reasonableness. And therefore it must be treated in a radically different way from the arts. This is an issue which is of course still with us.[13] What Aristotle has in mind may be developed along these lines: that the *polis* as *polis*, in contradistinction to the arts as arts, has a recalcitrance to reason, a recalcitrance which cannot be overcome—a thought which is expressed by Plato in his simile of the cave. The cave is a sphere beneath the earth. Political man as political man lives in that cave, and he can never leave it and live in the light of the sun. I read to you from a *Federalist* paper of uncertain origin, at least as my edition says. It is number 49.

"If it be true that all governments rest on opinion, it is no less true that the strength of opinion in each individual, and its practical influence on his conduct, depend much on the number which he supposes to have entertained the same opinion. The reason of man, like man himself, is timid and cautious when left alone, and acquires firmness and confidence in proportion to the number with which it is associated. When the examples which fortify opinion are ancient as well as numerous, they are known to have a double effect. In a nation of philosophers, this consideration ought to be disregarded [because neither the antiquity of the opinion nor the number of people holding it is, of course, of any relevance philosophically—LS]. A reverence for the laws would be sufficiently inculcated by the voice of an enlightened reason. But a nation of philosophers is as little to be expected as the philosophical race of kings wished for by Plato. And in every other nation, the most rational government will not find it a superfluous advantage to have the prejudices of the community on its side."[lvii]

[lvi] The tape was changed at this point.

[lvii] *Federalist* 49 (Madison), *The Federalist,* introduction by E. M. Earle (Washington, D.C.: National Home Library Foundation, n.d.).

There are many other statements, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, of this kind. I remind you of Edmund Burke's saying, a very extreme statement: "In proportion as the primitive rights of man are metaphysically true [meaning theoretically true—LS] they are morally and politically false."[lviii]

A very strong statement, "in *proportion*" . . . But the most amusing formulation of this which I know you will find in some passages in Macaulay's *History of England*, from which I will read. It deals with something recognized by present-day political science, but I believe not properly interpreted. Speaking of the abdication of James II, Macaulay says:

"It was not easy to draw up any form of words which would please all whose assent it was important to obtain; but at length, out of many suggestions offered from different quarters, a resolution was framed which gave general satisfaction.[lix]

"This resolution has been many times subjected to criticism as minute and severe as was ever applied to any sentence ever written by man [that is a typical exaggeration of Macaulay's—LS] and there perhaps never was a sentence written by man which would bear such criticism less."

Then he gives some examples of that.[lx]

"It is idle, however, to examine these memorable words as we should examine a chapter of Aristotle or Hobbes. Such words are to be considered not as words, but as deeds. If they effect that which they are intended to effect, they are rational though they may be contradictory. If they fail of attaining their end, they are absurd, though they carry demonstration with them. Logic admits of no compromise. The essence of politics is compromise."[lxi]

I will look at a few others in the same *History*. Here he speaks of the Toleration Act, passed by Parliament shortly after the Revolution:

"Of all the acts that have ever been passed by Parliament, the Toleration Act is perhaps that which most strikingly illustrates the peculiar vices and the peculiar excellences of English legislation.[lxii] The perfect lawgiver is a just temper between the mere man of theory, who can see nothing but general principles, and the man of business, who can see

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[lviii] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *Works*, 2:335. The actual quotation reads: "The pretended rights of these theorists are all extremes; and in proportion as they are metaphysically true, they are morally and politically false."

[lix] Macaulay continues: "It was moved that King James the Second, having endeavored to subvert the constitution of the kingdom by breaking the original contract between King and people, and, by the advice of Jesuits and other wicked persons, having violated the fundamental laws, and having withdrawn himself out of the kingdom, had abdicated the government, and that the throne had thereby become vacant."

[lx] Some sentences intervene before the occurrence of those quoted next.

[lxi] Macaulay, *History of England*, chapter 10, in *Works of Lord Macaulay Complete in Eight Volumes* (London: Longmans, Green, & co., 1873), 2:366–67.

[lxii] Text is omitted from the quotation.

nothing but particular circumstances.[lxiii] In English legislation, the practical sentiment[lxiv] has always predominated, and not seldom unduly predominated, over the theoretical.[lxv] To think nothing of symmetry, and much of convenience; never to remove an anomaly merely because it is an anomaly; never to innovate except when some grievance is felt; never to innovate except insofar as to get rid of the grievance; never to lay down any proposition of wider extent than the particular case for which it is necessary to provide; these are the rules which have, from the age of John to the age of Victoria, generally guided the deliberations of our two hundred and fifty Parliaments. Our national distaste for whatever is abstract in political science amounts undoubtedly to a fault. [He does not think of Lord Bertrand Russell[lxvi] here, of course.—LS] Yet it is, perhaps, a fault on the right side. That we have been far too slow to improve our laws must be admitted. But, though in other countries there may occasionally have been more rapid progress, it would not be easy to name any other in which there has been so little retrogression.

"The Toleration Act approaches very near to the idea of a great English law. To a jurist, versed in the theory of legislation, but not intimately acquainted with the temper of the sects and parties in which the nation was divided at the time of the Revolution, that Act would seem to be a mere chaos and contradiction.[lxvii] It will not bear to be tried by sound general principles. Nay, it will not bear to be tried by *any* principle, sound or unsound.[lxviii]

". . . But these very faults may appear to be merits, when we take into account[lxix] the passions and prejudices of those for whom the Toleration Act was framed."[lxx]

LS: I do not wish to continue this now, but there is another discussion of a British measure of the late seventeenth century, where he argues as follows: the major—there is of course a syllogism there, the major and minor and conclusion—the major did not fit the minor, and the conclusion did not follow from the major and the minor. But the major brought two hundred votes and the minor two hundred, and the conclusion: the same, therefore the thing passed.[lxxi] This he thinks is characteristic of political arguments as distinguished from theoretical arguments.

This,[14] [and] also what Burke says, [goes of course] much beyond what Aristotle says, but there is something important in common, which one can call in general terms fundamental recalcitrance of the *polis* to strictly theoretical reasoning. Aristotle says here in the Hippodamus section that the law's power is due entirely to custom or habit, not to its intrinsic reasonableness. This seems to contradict another statement of his according

[lxiii] Lines are omitted.
[lxiv] In the place of "sentiment" Macaulay has "element."
[lxv] In the place of "theoretical" Macaulay has "speculative."
[lxvi] Mentioned in session 7.
[lxvii] Macaulay has "chaos of absurdities and contradictions."
[lxviii] The reader omits text from the end of this paragraph (in Macaulay) and from the beginning of its successor.
[lxix] Macaulay has "consideration."
[lxx] Macaulay, *History*, chap. 11, in *Works* 2:463–65.
[lxxi] Evidently a reference to *Works* 2:367 ("They cared little whether their major agreed with their conclusion, if the major secured two hundred votes, and the conclusion two hundred more").

to which the law is a dictate of reason: as he puts it, it is a speech, or pronouncement, stemming from practical wisdom and understanding.[lxxii] Law is a dictate of reason: classical and Thomistic definition. But Aristotle says, you will note, in the *Ethics*: speech derivative from *some* practical wisdom.[lxxiii] But another reason why there is a difference between the Thomistic and the Aristotelian teaching is this. According to Aristotle laws—that is, all interesting laws—must be given with a view to the political order. Democratic laws differ from monarchic laws, oligarchic laws differ from democratic, etc. But most political orders you will find in effect are more or less defective, hence the laws given for them, to the extent to which they are given for them, cannot be simply reasonable. A certain adaptation to the political order, that is to say, to the opinions regarding justice which were known to these orders, is necessary. Now this leads me to the discussion given by Aristotle in book 3, to which I will turn after mentioning only one point regarding Aristotle's discussion of the actual regimes which are supposed to be good, namely, Sparta, Crete, and Carthage. Now only one point must I mention: that one of these beautiful cities was Carthage, not a Greek city. This alone suffices to prove that the translation of *polis* by "Greek city-state" is impossible. "City," yes, but not "Greek." It is an accident that there are more Greek cities than non-Greek cities. The city is not as such a Greek institution.

Book 3, to which I will turn now, contains the fundamental discussion of Aristotle's *Politics*. Of course one should read if one can the whole *Politics*, but precisely if one does so, one will find that the fundamental discussions are those in the third book. Let us read the beginning: "He who makes inquiries about the *politeiai*, which each of them is and what their character is, for him about the first inquiry is regarding the *polis*, what then a *polis* is."[lxxiv] Now this is a very strange beginning, for we know already what the *polis* is, don't we? Of course, the *polis* is the theme of political philosophy. Why then does Aristotle raise the question of the *polis* again? We learn now from this very beginning—we might have learned before if we had read every passage, but nowhere as visible as here—that the theme of political philosophy for Aristotle is not the *polis* but the *politeia*. I will now just use the Greek term, because the question of how to translate it is not easy to answer. I would like to mention only one fact: that *Politeia* is the Greek title, the correct title, of Plato's *Republic*. So not *polis*, but *politeia*.

Here Aristotle makes the strange proposal that we are interested in the *polis* and must find out what the *polis* is only because we are interested in the *politeia*, in the various forms of *politeia*. What is the reason? Hitherto we have learned that the *polis* is by nature; that it is by nature the peak or end of all other associations; that the *polis* is all-comprehensive and therefore directed towards the highest good; that it must recognize the independence of the private, namely, of the family or household, not so much in the sense of a private sphere in which everyone can do what he lists, but rather in the sphere of individual responsibility. "Political" is what has to do with the *polis*, and therefore people can ask, what is the political? and give all kinds of more or less far-fetched answers which would not be possible if the *polis* were remembered. Everyone knows, of

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[lxxii] *Politics* 3.1287a30.
[lxxiii] *NE* 10.1180a22.
[lxxiv] *Politics* 3.1272b32–34. Strauss's translation.

course, in a way what the political and nonpolitical are. Voting is a political action; buying food is not as such a political action but it can become [so] by accident, such as if you fetch some sandwiches for a man running for office who has no time to buy them himself. But this is an exception, it proves the rule. Yet the word "political" has another meaning, with which you are all familiar: This is politics; I don't want to have anything to do with it. Now what does "politics" mean here? Not simply dirty business, of course, because that you can find in other spheres of life. But the key point is [that] this is divisive. Say, what an Internal Revenue collector does is not as such political, because this is the law that you have to pay taxes and that is no longer, at least, a political issue.

When we speak of "political" in a negative way, we mean its divisive character in the first place. Now this divisive character of politics is taken up by Aristotle, but strangely and remarkably not as the seamy side of politics, as we would first see it, but as essential to the highest purpose of the *polis*. Aristotle goes on to say: So why must we ask what the *polis* is although we are concerned with the *politeia*? I believe it would be very unfriendly not to explain what "*politeia*" means, very briefly. The usual translation, I suppose also followed by Barker, is "constitution," a translation one could accept if "constitution" were meant in the way one may speak of a man's strong constitution, for example. In this sense it would be tolerable, but this we do not mean when we speak of constitution. Our understanding of constitution has gone through, presupposes historically the concept of fundamental laws of the land, a distinction which began to be made in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, I don't remember which one. For example, [that] the king in France had to be a man—no woman could become sovereign—or that the royal domain could not be disposed of by the king, and so on, these were fundamental laws which would not be changed except by the king. All other laws were non-fundamental,[15] [they] could be changed. The key point is that *politeiai* are not *any laws*. "*Politeia*" is used by Aristotle frequently in contradistinction to laws, fundamental or not fundamental. It would be simpler to say that "*politeia*" designates primarily the factual order of ruling, of power, which is at the very bottom of any legislation and which is in a way the cause of all legislation because the ruling part of the city gives the laws with a view to its ruling. That does not necessarily mean to its own advantage—that is a nasty interpretation, because it is at least thinkable that a ruling group rules with a view to the interests of the whole. Now if this is so, the key question in any political order is this: What kind of men are preponderant in this political society, rule in their own right, not by any delegation? President Johnson of course doesn't rule in his own right; he rules by elected delegation. In every society we find some man or body of men who rule in their own right. May I ask you who that is in the United States?

Student: The people.

LS: Yes, some men or body of men who rule in their own right, not by derivation. And the key question for Aristotle is: What kind of men rule in political society? This question in Aristotle's view is inseparable from the question: To what end is that society dedicated? Decent men—to take a very simple case from a children's book—decent men will be dedicated to decency and indecent men will be dedicated to various forms of indecency. We can make subdivisions, as we shall see. So the question of the *politeia*—I

translate it by the term "regime," the best that has occurred to me, and I shall accept a better one as soon as I learn of it—the various regimes, the variety of regimes, not the *polis* as *polis*, is the subject of Aristotle's political science. The point is this. The political issue is not the *polis*. People are not concerned politically with whether they should live in political society and have governments or not but in what kind of society and what kind of government. The practical issue is not the issue which never becomes a political issue, but a divisive issue, namely—well, in a happy society it does not become practically divisive, but in principle it is divisive. We understand this today immediately because we are in the very unfortunate situation of the Cold War; and the Cold War is of course not merely a conflict between two states, the United States and Russia, but between two kinds of regimes . . . what we call liberal democracy on the one hand, and communism on the other.

In the nineteenth century and in the halcyon days prior to World War I, this fact was greatly obscured. Men like Plato and Xenophon were severely criticized by modern historians of Greece as bad citizens because they did not simply and unqualifiedly identify themselves with the city of Athens. But after we have seen how many people were compelled to fight on the wrong side from the point of view of simple patriotism in these last twenty or thirty years, we see again that the simple, unqualified identification with the country of one's birth is possible only in very [happy] or at least in relatively happy times. In the early twentieth century, patriotism or, as it was called at that time, nationalism, could be taken for granted, there was no question about that. Most regimes, at least in the Western world, were relatively decent and no fundamental issue arose. Patriotism and/or nationalism were taken for granted as always [having] a natural basis. The possibility of fundamental dissension, of civil war, was not taken seriously enough, except of course by the communists. In the English Civil War, in the seventeenth century, patriots were a *party*: the patriots here, the Royalists there. At that time patriotism was not taken for granted. It meant to take the side of the sovereignty of the people against the sovereignty of the king. Now the defeat of the doctrine of the divine right of kings, which was completed by the French Revolution and its consequences, made the sovereignty of the people the basis of political theory. And this is of course true today everywhere: the communist doctrine [and] the fascist doctrine are explicitly based on the sovereignty of the people—only they have some qualifications: that it is best for the sovereignty of the only part of the people that is truly people: that is, the proletariat, that there be a dictatorship of the proletariat. This is only a modification of the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people. On this basis, the doctrines of Aristotle were simply unintelligible. We begin to understand them now out of our experience.

I will leave it at that. Is there any point which one could take up in the few minutes we still have?

Mr. Bruell: Would you say that the subject of the *Republic* is more the *polis*?

LS: That is a long question, because *politeia* has more than one meaning, and the most important one is the one which I sketched: regime. But it can also mean to lead the life of a citizen. This ambiguity is very important in that case.

Student: Could we, from a close reading of Aristotle's *Politics*, see that he has seen implications of his teaching for collectivization of thought, as distinguished from collectivization of . . .

LS: No, in the sense in which we mean it we couldn't, because what we call ideologies did not exist. When you read the discussion of the variety of regimes in the eighth or ninth book of Plato's *Republic*—that is clearer than in Aristotle's *Politics*—there are certain opinions which go with different regimes. For example, the opinion going with democracy is that the end of political life is freedom, whereas oligarchy thinks in terms of wealth. These are opinions going with certain parts of society. I mean, ordinarily a rich man is not democratic and a poor man is not oligarchic. Aristotle makes very clear that the rivalry between oligarchy and democracy, very crudely speaking, is that of the rich and the poor. But there is no ideology for the very simple reason that everyone says in a very straightforward manner exactly what he is after. Of course, a certain element of hypocrisy—if it was hypocrisy, it can also have been self-deception—naturally went with those things. The honest democrats and the honest oligarchs believe that freedom as the democrats understand it and wealth as the oligarchs understand it is the best for the *polis*, but not in the name of some ideology but simply saying: How can you have a city which defends itself well, which has the proper naval and other equipment, if there are not wealthy people around to pay for that? And similar considerations regarding freedom, of course. And that is not an ideology; an ideology is some form of theoretical thing—I would say pseudo-theoretical, but let us take a more lenient view and say: something which seems to stem from theoretical considerations and that is absent from these earlier doctrines.

Student: Just straightforward selfishness.

LS: It does not have to be selfishness, but it does not go beyond the political. For example, if, say, somewhere a tribe in Africa refuses to be ruled by people wholly alien to them, I would hesitate to call this nationalism, because nationalism is a certain theory and you don't need a theory. This grows up with men living together with people whose language they do not understand. They may permit them to live among them, but they don't wish to be ruled by them. Do you see this simple difference between a natural reaction which doesn't match any elaboration and theoretical considerations?

Student: There would be, for example, rights of Englishmen but no rights of man.

LS: Yes, you can put it this way. The natural right of man is a doctrine of philosophic origin, in other words. We may have an occasion to speak of that later.

We must now make this deplorable interruption of three meetings, one and a half weeks, after which we will return, if everything goes well, to the question of the *politeia*—I mean, of the potentiality of civil war. Nothing less than that is implied in the Aristotelian doctrine of *politeia*.

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[1] Deleted "and"

[2] Deleted “than.”
[3] Deleted “Things are.”
[4] Deleted “become.”
[5] Deleted “here.”
[6] Deleted “You may.”
[7] Deleted “that he engages.”
[8] Deleted “consists not only—the city.”
[9] Deleted “them.”
[10] Deleted “this.”
[11] Deleted “because.”
[12] Deleted “point.”
[13] Deleted “One may speak.”
[14] Moved “goes of course.”
[15] Deleted “which.”

Session 12: no date

Aristotle, *Politics*, book 3

Leo Strauss: Political life or political action is concerned with either preservation or change: the preservation of what is good and change for the better. This implies some opinion of what is good or bad, and opinion as such points to knowledge. The complete knowledge of what is involved in political things would be the knowledge of what constitutes the good society. This is the full political good, the common good, and this was the concern of political philosophy as long as it was recognized. Now we are concerned today with the situation in which political philosophy has lost its plausibility, the belief in its possibility, although the general reasoning which I sketched now and again has still its former evidence. Now this is due in the first place to the power of what we call positivism . . . the view that the highest form of knowledge, nay, the only form of knowledge, is scientific knowledge . . . the view which we traced to August Comte, who coined the term "positive philosophy." Now in Comte's point of view, [at] the stage in which science is predominant, there must be rule of the men of science as a kind of spiritual power belonging to the modern world. We all know that this notion has lost all credibility, although it still lingers on in various places. For example, the Supreme Court makes decisions on the basis of pronouncements of social science; then we see something of this kind. It is nominally referred to as the problem of technocracy, which as technocracy is not democracy.

Now the key point concerning Comte's doctrine of the three stages, theological, metaphysical, and positive: In the earlier stages, theological and metaphysical, men were concerned primarily with the Why, with first causes and ultimate ends, but in scientific study it can be limited to the How. The difficulty here is that the theological and metaphysical questions, while being excluded by science, still remain; they remain questions. To avoid the difficulty one must declare that these questions are not only not answerable scientifically but that they are meaningless. As a moment's reflection shows, this fails, however.

This is not the immediate difficulty we have, for it is caused by a development long after Comte: the distinction between fact and value, that no value judgment as such can be a rational judgment. We must take this together with the rejection of metaphysics. The questions which concern men most deeply, the most important questions, are beyond the competence of science, and this leads necessarily to the flight from scientific reason—a triumph of science itself, about which you are aware, if not from books, at least from articles in the most sophisticated magazines. The key consideration—the only one which I would like to repeat, because it goes to the root of the matter—is that according to the strict understanding of positivism, only scientific knowledge is genuine knowledge. This is in blatant contradiction to the fact that science, and especially positivistic science, rests on prescientific knowledge or commonsense knowledge, and this commonsense knowledge can in no way be transformed into scientific knowledge, as can be shown by looking at the most interesting cases. Commonsense knowledge, which is the basis of

scientific knowledge, is unaware of the distinction between facts and values. And here in the matrix of all social science, one finds no basis for this distinction which is now regarded by many as self-evident.

But one can say this is of no importance to political philosophy because commonsense knowledge, common sense, is variable historically, and so there was Greek common sense, Babylonian common sense, and so on. If there is no possibility of an invariable answer, an answer for all men at all times, then political philosophy is impossible. What should happen to it is another story, but it is no longer possible. Now this view, that there is no possibility of invariable answers, is called historicism. All thought rests ultimately upon absolute presuppositions, as Comte would put it, which differ from epoch to epoch and which are not susceptible of rational criticism. As a consequence of the cooperation of positivism and historicism, political philosophy is today radically problematic. There is no longer any possibility of starting with the premises that existed surely up until about two generations ago. There is however some consolation, some kind of universal agreement, namely, as regards the possibility and the necessity of studying the history of political philosophy. Therefore we have no choice but to learn to replace for the time being, as it were, political philosophy by its history. The study of the history must be done properly, open-mindedly, namely, open-minded to the possibility of political philosophy and not merely closed to it, as is the case in most approaches.

Now we turn therefore to the study of the history of political philosophy, and here we observe that the primary issue is the quarrel of the ancients and moderns. Political philosophy emerged in Greece. Socrates appears to be the founder, and this led to the kind of political philosophy we call classical, which includes medieval to the extent we can call it medieval political philosophy and not theology. The break with this tradition occurred in modern times; most vividly in Hobbes, but if you dig a little bit you come across Machiavelli, a man who prepared the great changes effected by Hobbes. The theme of the history of political philosophy is to understand this fundamental difference between ancient and modern—the quarrel.

Now then we discussed briefly the grounds on which Machiavelli, Hobbes, and their successors turned against practical political philosophy. And we discussed then the characteristics of classical political philosophy generally and we turned then to Aristotle's *Politics* to acquire a more concrete understanding of[1] what political philosophy originally meant. We observed that in Aristotle's *Politics* there is a twofold beginning, in the beginnings of books 1 and 3, and this twofold beginning has substantial reasons. The *Politics* begins with the discussion of the *polis*, the city, and its relation to the household or family. The family needs the *polis* and, it is argued by Aristotle against Plato, the *polis* needs the family, the household. The subject in book 3 is not the *polis* but the *politeia*, a term which we translate by "regime." And we saw from the beginning of the third book that it is the *politeia*, the regime, and not the *polis* which is the theme of Aristotle's *Politics*. The difference between the discussion in book 1 and that in book 3 is simply stated as follows: in the first book the parts of the city, the most comprehensive association, appear to be the smaller associations, among which the family is most

important; but in book 3, the parts of the city appear to be not any association but the citizens. We will see immediately what this means.

The theme becomes the regime in contradistinction to the city. This Greek word *politeia* is ordinarily translated by the term "constitution." I gave reasons why I think "regime" is a better translation. Now what is the issue of the *politeia*? It is the political issue, meaning the divisive issue. That there should be families is not a political issue; only some crackpots suggest from time to time the abolition of the family. But the regime is always actually or potentially a political issue. Whether or not there should be a political association is not a political thought, but the regime necessarily is. When Lasswell defines the subject matter of political science as who gets what, when, one has to say: Yes, one can say that provisionally, but who gets what, when depends on who has the power and to what degree or extent, and that is a question of the regime.[i] Obviously, in a feudal monarchy other people get what and when very differently from what they would get in a democracy. So the question of power, as it is ordinarily called, is more precisely stated [as] the question of the *form* of power, the question of the regime.

It is immediately intelligible today from the Cold War, with which we are all more or less familiar, that the issue is of course not this country and Russia, but the difference of regimes, liberal democracy and communism. I do not deny that[2] between these two enormous territorial areas, one located in Eurasia and one located in this hemisphere,[3] there might be all kinds of tensions even if they had the same regime. But as it is, the conflict as it actually exists is not understandable without taking into account the difference of regimes. The Cold War shows us directly that Aristotle's question regarding the regime is the question guiding present-day political life, and to some extent even academic political science. For an important part of that, as you know, is comparative government. But what is comparative government? Fundamentally, comparison of the various regimes or, in another respect, a discussion of the "isms": the "isms" are the justifications of the various regimes. This is quite different from the situation of political science in the nineteenth century, where it could simply be said [that] the subject matter of political science is the state, which is not in itself divisive. By virtue of the fact that civil wars played, and play, such a tremendous role in the twentieth century, whereas they played a much smaller role in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this explains again why we understand Aristotle and Aristotle's *Politics* in a peculiar light, because we are again in the grip of a radical political crisis.

It is a crisis which was not visible in the nineteenth century for a variety of reasons, the most striking one being belief in progress: the certainty that the most desirable regime, that of maximum freedom and equality, was bound to win. That is no longer such a certainty, and therefore we have to dig somewhat more deeply. Russia or, for that matter, Upper Volta, is a theme for geography and history, or sociology, but the regimes of these countries are the themes of political science. So we see then that what Aristotle regards—and he more emphatically and clearly than any other political writers—as the theme of political science, the regime, is evidently still the theme for us. The fundamental problem is identical, but when one speaks of fundamental and invariable problems one must not

[i] Harold Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936).

assume that they are accessible equally to all times. There are times when the fundamental problems are covered over, perhaps these are the happiest times. But they are also, precisely because they are happy,[4] an inducement to falling asleep. And therefore, to the extent to which we are theoretical men, men of science, we must not be concerned primarily with the happiness of the age in which we live but rather with the opportunity or necessity it imposes upon itself to think about the fundamental issues.

Now we turn then to Aristotle's discussion of this key subject in the third book. We have read and discussed the very first lines of the third book. You have the Barker translation. In the first sentence of the third book, Aristotle makes it quite clear that we are interested in the *polis* only to the extent that we are interested in the *politeia*, the regime. Here there arises a question: Because we are interested in the *politeia*, we must know what the *polis* is. Now what does Aristotle mean by raising this question again? He goes on as follows. Is there anyone who could sit and read to the class these passages? Mr. Reinken, who does this excellently, isn't here. Is there anyone who has taken lessons in elocution? Well, then I will simply dictate: Mr. Bruell, sit down and bring your Barker with you. At the second sentence. To repeat, before we hear Mr. Bruell, the question is: Why must we be concerned with what the *polis* is? After all, we have heard it before.

Reader:[ii]
"What is the nature of the *polis*?"[iii] In the first place, the nature of the "*polis*," or city, is at present a disputed question—

LS: No, wait. "For now they are engaged in controversy. Some say the *polis* has done the actions, and others say, not the *polis*, but the oligarchy, or the tyrant."[iv] Is this intelligible? Think of what happened in Russia after the communist revolution: the debts. Not the *polis* has done it, not the Russian people, but this clique. Who is speaking here? Who makes this argument? Obviously not an adherent of the tyrant, nor of the oligarchy. The speaker is a democrat. What does he imply? Democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny are of course examples of regimes. If there is no democracy, if the people do not rule, there is no *polis*. The *polis* has been destroyed for the time being. "Forms of government," we say, which is tolerable as a phrase, but "regime" is clearer, I think you will see for certain reasons. There is a work of Alexander Pope: "Our forms of government let fools contest/Whichever is best administered, is best."[v] This much we can discern now: that is not Aristotelian. There are regimes which cannot be well-administered, because nothing would be improved if they were. If a tyrant administers his tyranny well, that might be worse for his subjects than if he were very inefficient. Now what is the next argument he uses?

Reader:

[ii] Mr. Bruell serves as reader in this session.
[iii] Here Barker interpolates "[There are three reasons for so doing]," that is, for beginning the present inquiry about the *polis* with the question just raised.
[iv] *Politics* 3.1274b33–36.
[v] From Pope's *Essay on Man*, Epistle 3, ll. 303 ff. Pope has "For forms," not "Our forms."

In the second place, all the activity of the statesman and the lawgiver is obviously concerned with the state—

LS: "With the city. And the regime is some form of order operational"—let us say "of the inhabitants of the city."[vi]

That is the first definition we get. You see, it is an order of the inhabitants of the city. Of the inhabitants of the city; he doesn't say "of the citizens." Why? Because one depends already on the regime or he is not a citizen, and this precisely is the divisive issue: who is or is not a citizen. If there are various degrees of citizenship, full and not so full—this of course, as we know from every daily newspaper, is today an issue, from what they say about the goings-on in Alabama and other places.[vii] The city consists on the one hand of households, and on the other of citizens. The formal issue is non-divisive. It is politically neutral, we can say: there is no difference between democrats and oligarchs or tyrants about the fact that there should be families. But the question of who is or is not a citizen is fundamentally controversial. The political par excellence—this one cannot emphasize strongly enough—is what is divisive. The reason is this. There is no city without some order, without a form. The inhabitants are the matter, to use Aristotelian language. The order gives the city its character. When we speak of the state and forms of the state, we obscure that fact. The question then for Aristotle, as it appears immediately, is: Who is a citizen? Because we know this much: that who is or is not a citizen differs from regime to regime. Now Aristotle gives a definition of a citizen which is this: he is a citizen who participates in judging and in ruling. "Ruling" means here "giving commands." But Aristotle says this definition which suggests itself so naturally, so easily, applies primarily to the citizen in a democracy. But why does he come up first with the democratic definition of a citizen? I would say this is not an accident, just as it is not an accident that political philosophy emerged in democratic Athens. Democracy, debate, public debate—there is some connection between that, as we all know, and political philosophy.

But still, the definition, being tailored to democracy, is for this reason too special. We need a generalized version. And then Aristotle says a citizen is a man who participates in unlimited ruling, literally translated. What does he mean by that? There is no limit in two respects: no limit regarding time—a citizen is a lifelong participant in ruling, and no limitation regarding subject matter. A general has his rule limited to war, a treasurer has rule limited to fiscal matters, but there is some man or body of men, as someone said later on, who must have unlimited rule. We will soon see the difference.

The rule is unlimited regarding time. The rule of the citizen is not on the basis of any election as, say, a president may be—that is a kind of delegated rule. What Aristotle says here must remind every one of you, I think, of a concept which has become very powerful in modern times. How would this be called, what Aristotle calls here unlimited rule, in modern times? We find in the early definitions of rule in modern times, and especially in Hobbes, exactly this unlimitedness. The thing which is in common is this:

[vi] *Politics* 3.1274b36–38.

[vii] Strauss is referring to the Civil Rights Movement.

there are always men who rule in their own right and not by delegation. Since they rule in their own right, there is not necessarily any limitation regarding the [. . .] It is also implied there is no possibility of appeal from their decision to any higher authority. Now what is the difference between the modern doctrine of sovereignty and the Aristotelian doctrine? If you want to simply arrive at an answer which cannot be altogether wrong, you may read the classic statement in Hobbes, especially in *Leviathan,* chapter 18. We would see then immediately that Hobbean doctrine—the same is true also of [. . .]—is a legal doctrine: What are the rights which the sovereign has?

Aristotle's doctrine can negatively be described as not being a legal doctrine, and this has grave implications. Let us turn to 1275bl7 to 21.

Reader:
But our definition of citizenship[viii] can be amended. We have to note that in constitutions other than the democratic, members of the assembly and the courts do not hold that office for an indeterminate period. They hold it for a limited term; and it is to persons with such a tenure (whether they be many or few) that the citizen's function of deliberating and judging (whether on all issues or only a few) is assigned in these constitutions.[ix]

LS: In other words, the specifically democratic institutions are the jury and the assembly. They would not exist in the same way in an oligarchy. And yet there is citizenship there, obviously: these men have perhaps *the* political power. There must be a definition of the citizen applicable to them as well as to the democratic citizen.

Reader:
The nature of citizenship in general emerges clearly from these considerations; and our final definitions will accordingly be: (1) "he who enjoys the right of sharing in deliberative or judicial office[x] attains thereby the status of a citizen of his state," and (2) "a polis, in its simplest terms, is a body of such persons adequate in number for achieving a self-sufficient existence."[xi]

LS: "Office" is of course a slightly misleading translation because the word is *archē,* which is simply ruling, having the rule, having the initiative. "He who has the privilege to participate in deliberative and judging ruling," meaning, giving commands. Obviously a judge gives commands, but the deliberator also gives commands because deliberation necessarily issues, or should issue, in a decision—say, a law, declaration of war, or whatever it may be—and this is a command given to others. So in other words, in every society there are some men, more or less, from whom all power of commanding stems, and in such a way that their power is not a delegated power. The individual citizen may

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[viii] Here Barker adds an interpolation in reference to difficulties involved with the task of defining the citizen: "[may still be maintained, in spite of these difficulties, since it]."
[ix] *Politics* 3.1275b13–17. Note: There is no indication in the transcript whether it is Strauss or the student who reads this passage. Here and in what follows, where the transcript is unclear, it will always be assumed that passages from the *Politics* are read out by the student.
[x] Barker interpolates "[for any period, fixed or unfixed]."
[xi] 3.1275b17–21.

be elected to a magistracy and that of course is a delegated power, but the power he has as member of a sovereign body is not a delegated power. The sovereign, as we say in modern language, cannot be called to account. So we know now what a citizen is: men who participate in three functions above all—the deliberative, which is the same as what we would call today decision making. It is quite interesting that it is not called decision making by Aristotle, but deliberation. When you speak of decisionmaking you may forget that the decision is meant to be the outcome of deliberation. When you speak of deliberation, this danger is obviated. Mr. Levy?

Mr. Levy: Mr. Strauss, I'm sorry, but I don't see the difference between Aristotle's first definition, the one that belongs with democracy, and his second definition, the one that's supposed to be general. What would the difference be?

LS: Now let me see this wording, the precise wording. "To participate in judgment and in ruling."

Mr. Levy: Would that be from election, meaning "elected"?

LS: No, ruling is much larger. You must not forget that there are also what we now call executives, say, a general, and even down to a simple policeman. They also have the right of command. But in this case it is perfectly clear that these rights are all delegated powers, and what we are concerned with is the non-delegated powers, the original powers.

Mr. Levy: Wouldn't that rather be a right of electing?

LS: Electing magistrates? Sure, but Aristotle sees it concentrated, not in this elective power, but in the deliberative and judging power.

Mr. Levy: The word used for judging in the first definition: could that possibly be translated "electing" instead of "judging"?

LS: No. It could be stretched, but I don't think it means that. Later on he has long discussions about the order of rank between the various functions which the ruling body has. But the deliberative one, which includes the legislative, is always the most important. Yes?

Student: At the end of the second definition he said, "the city is a body of such citizens, large enough to be self-sufficient." But according to the second definition, in a tyranny or an oligarchy you would only have one or a few citizens.

LS: Not only one or a few, that would be very extreme.

Student: Well, in a tyranny the only person who would rule in his own right would be the tyrant.

LS: Yes, but the question is whether that can be called a regime, and we will come to that later. The question would be the absolute monarchy, a subject so interesting Aristotle devotes to it the second part of book 3. Aristotle proceeds step by step. He starts from what everyone knows from experience—in this case, in Athens, in a democracy. Then he sees that this is not sufficient because there are regimes other than a democracy, [and] therefore this great enlargement is still not broad enough. In what sense you can speak of citizens in an absolute monarchy is difficult to say. You know, it was not so very long ago that in a great modern democracy called Great Britain there were no citizens, but subjects. It happened I think in the last generation that they became citizens. Now this was more a quaint antiquarianism of the British, I think, than anything of importance politically, but it indicates that for a long time there were no citizens. In an absolute monarchy there is no one who participates by his own right in judging and deliberating. If so, the king has appointed him.

Now let us read the next section, because[5] this is a relatively theoretical level on which we speak, but we must never forget the simple level, of which he speaks immediately[6] [following].

Reader:
For practical purposes—

LS: more literally, that is "*for use*"

Reader:
it is usual to define a citizen as 'one born of citizen parents on both sides,' and not on the father's or mother's side only; but sometimes this requirement is carried still further back, to the length of two, three, or more stages of ancestry.

LS: So in other words, sometimes also the grandparents must have been citizens, and it can go on and on.

Reader:
This popular and facile definition has induced some thinkers to raise the question, "How did the citizen of the third or fourth stage of ancestry himself come to be a citizen?" Gorgias of Leontini—perhaps partly from a sense of this difficulty and partly in irony—said, "As mortars are things which are made by the craftsmen who are mortar-makers, so Larissaeans are persons who are made by the 'craftsmen' who are Larissaean-makers."

LS: Perhaps he means here at the same time the magistrates of Larissa.

Reader:

But[xii] the matter is really simple. If, in their day, they enjoyed constitutional rights in the sense of our own definition,[xiii] they were certainly citizens.

LS: The main point is, if they participated in ruling and in judging, then they are citizens, regardless of whether their parents were. Yes?

Reader:
It is obviously impossible to apply the requirement of descent from a citizen father or a citizen mother to those who were the first inhabitants or original founders of a state.[xiv]

LS: Do you see the absurdity which follows from the political definition which Aristotle calls "political and crude"? Everything political is necessarily crude, and therefore Aristotle is compelled in his deeper discussion to go beyond that. But for the crude view, a citizen is a descendant of another citizen, yet who is a citizen in an oligarchy differs from the citizen in a liberal democracy. For the notion of what this means, to be a good citizen, differs profoundly. The good citizen is relative to the regime. But this, Aristotle points out, does not change a fundamental nonrelativism: there is a kind of goodness which has no relativity to the regime, and that is the goodness of man as man. By "a good man," thoughtful unbiased people mean everywhere the same: a just man, a moderate man, brave, and the other virtues. And therefore the good man could possibly act as a standard allowing us to distinguish between preferable and less preferable regimes. Aristotle does not go into this at this point. He only stresses this identity of the good man compared with the variability of the good citizen, and he gives us an inkling of a solution by saying that the good man and the good citizen coincide only in one case, namely, in the citizen of the best regime when he is exercising a ruling function, because then all the virtues which he has in the highest form come into play when he is politically active.

After these remarks, Aristotle turns now to an explicit discussion of the various regimes. He has given us an indication of why the questions of regime are the most important questions, and he has always understood without any proof because everyone knows it, that there is a variety of regimes. But now it becomes necessary for him to have a comprehensive notion of these varieties. After all, we must know how many and what kind these regimes are and how they differ from each other. Aristotle determines the variety of regimes on the basis of two considerations. First, what is the purpose of the city? And second, how many kinds of rule over men[7] exist? The purpose of the city is necessary to consider because otherwise we will have no criterion for distinguishing between good and bad regimes or between better and worse. That regime is better which is more in accordance with the purpose of the city; and this question of better and worse regimes leads of course eventually to the question of the best regime, as I believe I do not have to make clear.

[xii] Barker inserts here this interpolation: "[there is no reason to raise any difficulty about the title of the earlier citizens]."
[xiii] An interpolation appears here in Barker: "[i.e. the right of sharing in judicial or deliberative office]."
[xiv] *Politics* 3.1275b22–34.

Now what are these purposes for which men live in civil society? There are three. First, man is by nature a political animal. This is here understood in a strict sense. Men love living together as such, independent of considerations of benefits, advantages. I think we can always check that to some extent: only in certain extreme situations would we wish to live in complete solitude and never to see another human being. Ordinarily we like human company. The second purpose is the common good, and the common good is to live nobly. Without proving it here, Aristotle assumes that living nobly is essentially living together. Living nobly means the practice of the virtues, and the practice of the virtues requires, not necessarily in all cases of all virtues but generally speaking, living together. But there is also a third purpose which he mentions, and that is mere life, in a word, mere survival. This passage is of some interest to a broader question . . .

Reader:
The good life is the chief end, both for the community as a whole and for each of us individually. But men also come together, and form and maintain political associations, merely for the sake of life; for perhaps there is some element of the good even in the simple act of living, so long as the evils of existence do not preponderate too heavily. It is an evident fact that most men cling hard enough to life to be willing to endure a good deal of suffering, which implies that life has in it a sort of healthy happiness and a natural sweetness.[xv]

LS: So that is very interesting, that people enter civil society for the sake of mere life, not for the good life. Does this remind you of the argument of another political philosopher?

Student: Rousseau.

LS: No . . .

Student: Hobbes.

LS: Yes, the teacher of self-preservation as best. You are quite right about Rousseau, but this is on a somewhat deeper level than I would like to go at this point. So what a difference! What does Hobbes say about our clinging to life? Does he speak of a natural sweetness of life? No! The terror of death. That is so characteristic of Hobbes, that he never speaks of the natural sweetness which Achilles, for example, when he is in the netherworld, describes: he says it is better to be a day-laborer and slave on earth than a king in Hades.[xvi] This is quite remarkable. To make this very clear: it is quite necessary for Hobbes to have this teaching. According to Hobbes, there is no *summum bonum*, no highest good, whereas Aristotle says: Of course there is a highest good. But Hobbes teaches that on the other hand there is a *summum malum*, a highest evil. A very paradoxical expression. Of course, that is death. Here is one beautiful illustration of what happened. And don't think that it is only Hobbes, because what Locke teaches about

[xv] *Politics* 3.1278b23–30. For "sweetness" Barker has "quality of pleasure"; the substitution suggests that Strauss may be reading.
[xvi] *Odyssey* 11.489–91.

pleasure and pain is in a milder form of expression, Locke being a much less nasty and naughty man than Hobbes was, [but] the same thing fundamentally.

What was mentioned with Rousseau a moment ago is correct. It is one of the points where Rousseau returns in a way to the ancients against Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau's argument being that self-preservation would not have this fundamental importance if life itself did not have this natural sweetness. He does not use exactly the same words, but almost: he speaks of the sentiment of existence, which is simply pleasant and which is the deepest thing in man.

But let us return to Aristotle. We have seen the three reasons, grounds [for] why man enters society. Now we must consider: How many kinds of rule over men are there? Aristotle gives here three. The rule of the master over the slave: in Greek, *despotikē*, from which "despot" is misderived. Despotism and tyranny have totally different meanings in the classical tradition, and the identification of tyranny and despotism which has taken place in the eighteenth century is a minor historical question. The despot means simply the rule of master over slave and of course, if the man is a natural slave, there is nothing wrong with that according to Aristotle.

Then there is economic rule: rule within the household, that is, which as rule over slaves is fundamentally in the interest of the master. I mean, that this poor fellow is prevented from mischief, from harming himself by his extreme stupidity, is accidental: the main point is the master gets someone who shaves him and takes care of a few other things which are below his dignity. But the rule of a husband over his wife or a father over his children is primarily in the interests of the ruled.

Then there is a third kind of rule, which is political rule, where there is ruling and being ruled in turn. Clearly, the wife is not supposed to rule over the husband the next day, and even less so the children, but in political rule there is such a thing, the assumption being that the political community is a community of free and equal men—there may be unfree and unequal ones outside. This is indeed for the benefit of the ruled. That is to say, if [8]President Johnson is still ruling, it is understood that he will rule for the benefit of the U.S. Of course it is also understood that is for the benefit of President Johnson, because he is after all a citizen of the U.S. Aristotle has a nice comparison:[9] if someone, a gymnastic trainer, who trains his pupils in the interest of the pupils that they should become fit bodies, should himself join in the training by showing the motions which they make, his own body becomes fitter. Accidentally it is in the interest of the trainer, and in this case of President Johnson. We can say that political rule is rule for the common good.

Now from these characterizations of rule it follows that despotic rule, the rule of master over slave, is always against the character of the political association. But the two others, economic rule, rule of the father, and political rule proper, are in themselves possibly good. The argument leads up to a simple schema which you must learn by heart if you do not know it. It is very simple, but it turns up again and again and you need it to see how it

is modified by other thinkers. [LS writes on the blackboard] There is the good and the bad—first distinction. The other is the number of rulers.

One**:** The good ruler is *kingship*; the bad ruler is *tyranny*.
Few**:** Good rule of few, *aristocracy*; bad rule of few, *oligarchy*.
Many**:** Good rule of many, he calls *polity* (with the same word, *politeia*, which is used for regime in general);[10] the bad rule of many[11] is *democracy*, according to Aristotle.

Nothing is here omitted. There are of course mixed forms. This division has been made by Plato in his *Statesman* before, though there is one difference and that is that Plato does not make a distinction between a good and bad democracy, because democracy is a weak regime and therefore it cannot be too much bad and too much good either way.[xvii]

But this is of course a merely external schema and in itself not quite intelligible, because it is this kind of form. And Aristotle has proof for that because he gives a long discussion which we cannot read now on the following consideration:[12] by oligarchy is understood the rule of the rich, though it is not stated here; similarly, by democracy everyone means the rule of the poor. No one denies that this is the most common problem, especially during the Peloponnesian War. But much beyond that, every city has two kinds of men, the most massively important distinction: the rich and the poor. Machiavelli says the same thing many years later, and even today we can still recognize it. "Poor," by the way, never means beggars but people who have to earn their living, whereas the rich are people who do not have to work. I think we can even today make that distinction. So the practical standpoint is not this schema—although we need this to make sure, lest anything has been forgotten—the practical standpoint is from the difference between democracy and oligarchy, the rule of the rich and the rule of the poor. Aristotle has a very amusing discussion: Why should there not be a regime in which the few are poor and the many are rich? [It is] theoretically possible but not practical, to say the least.

But this much is clear: one form is defective because wealth is not the most important consideration for rule, nor freedom, because a freeborn citizen may be very stupid and very wicked, just as a rich citizen may be very stupid and very wicked. So we wonder whether there is not a kind of mixture of the two which might be superior. Aristotle says there is.[13] He first speaks of the *politeia*, the regime, in which all men able to serve as heavy-armed infantrymen are citizens. This means of course, in a word, property qualifications.[14] The arms of a light-armed soldier are much less expensive than heavy armor, therefore they are more or less substantial citizens. Now you will see the way in which Aristotle argues this out. The principle is to be or [to] have been a heavily-armed soldier, that is to say, not mere wealth or mere freedom but the patriotic view which sees that it is the same fatherland despite the changes in regime. From this it follows that he takes a patriotic view of the good citizen. A good citizen is the man who continues to serve his country despite all changes of regime. You know, in recent times there was some controversy in France [about] whether those magistrates who served under Vichy loyally, and then under de Gaulle, and so forth—whether they are not, after all is said and

[xvii] *Statesman* 291c–292a, 302c–303b.

done, better citizens, better Frenchmen, than those who were loyal to one particular regime.[xviii]

The democrats and oligarchs are those whom we call partisans; the patriots are not partisans, and the partisan is to that extent not a patriot because he regards something as more important than the fatherland.[15] The partisans are those who adhere to a particular regime, who say there is no *polis* if the right kind of regime is not established. Now people do not necessarily say, as in our case:[16] The city didn't do it, the tyrant did it. In our time, I believe the oligarchs would say: The country is going to pieces. Well, the country, if it is going to pieces, is no longer in existence and its final disappearance will follow. This we call the partisan view. And clearly the partisans will call the patriots turncoats: because they served the Third Republic, they served Vichy, they were turncoats.

There was a man somehow connected with Athens, Theramenes, who did exactly this—whether from purity of heart or less pure motives is of course impossible to discern—but he was called a turncoat, whereas people who admired him said: No, he is the good citizen; he put a higher value on Athens, the permanent substance, than the superficial regime.[xix] Do you see how important that issue is and how it undercuts all other political discussions? And only in very happy times, when a regime is firmly established and there are no considerable clouds on the political horizon, does this question not arise.

We see it in the following manner. People like Xenophon—and especially Xenophon, who fought in the Peloponnesian War on the Spartan side, i.e., on the wrong side, against his father—in the early nineteenth century, when political historians influenced by the French Revolution went over these old facts, they thought what Xenophon had done was terrible. He fought against his own country! Traitor. This was the first time that Xenophon's wreath was taken off his head, on this ground. If this historian, Niebuhr was his name, had lived a hundred fifty years he would have seen that there were people born in Germany who fought against Hitler's German army, and we do not wish to say they were morally inferior people.[xx] Only in simple and quiet times do such questions not come up. Needless to say, that is legally insoluble because every law will identify itself with some type of regime, but not all legally insoluble questions are for this reason nonexistent questions.

[xviii] Strauss is referring here and in the next paragraph to officials who served under the collaborationist government after the French defeat and occupation by Nazi Germany during World War II, and later the restored republic after liberation.

[xix] Theramenes was a fifth-century Athenian politician who was involved in both the oligarchic coup of 411 and the regime of the Thirty Tyrants established under Spartan auspices after Athenian defeat in 404. In both cases he eventually clashed with the more extremist elements within the government, in the latter case fatally. The controversy surrounding his legacy is attested at Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians* 28.5.

[xx] See Barthold Georg Niebuhr, *Lectures on Ancient History*, trans. L. Schmitz, vol. 2 (London: Taylor, Walton, and Maberly, 1852), 36.

So the political question as Aristotle presents it is this: What makes a city the same city? What makes a country the same country? The patriots are wrong and the partisans are wrong. The patriots say: There is always the same country. The partisans say: Only if that regime we favor is established, the city is what makes the country. Aristotle says: Since the regime is able to change from an oligarchy to a democracy, the city is a place by nature. But to judge one city by another city—this is the apparently paradoxical character of Aristotle's teaching. Or you might say Aristotle is very precise and follows what is said in our common way of speaking, [the] sensible judgment. Let us now read further.

Reader:
Still assuming a single population inhabiting a single territory, shall we say that the state retains its identity as long as the stock of its inhabitants remains the same (although the old members are always dying and new members are always being born)?[xxi] Or must we take a different view, and say that while the population remains the same, for the reason already mentioned,[xxii] the city may none the less change?[xxiii]

If a *polis* is a form of association, and if this form of association is an association of citizens in a polity or constitution, it would seem to follow inevitably that when the constitution suffers a change in kind, and becomes a different constitution, the polis also will cease to be the same *polis*, and will change its identity. We may cite an analogy from the drama. We say that a chorus which appears at one time as a comic and at another as a tragic chorus is not continuously the same, but alters its identity—and this in spite of the fact that the members often remain the same. What is true of a chorus is also true of every other form of association, and of all other compounds generally. If the scheme of composition is different, the compound becomes a different compound. A harmony composed of the same notes will be a different harmony according as the "mode"[xxiv] is Dorian or Phrygian. If this is the case, it is obvious that the criterion to which we must chiefly look in determining the identity of the state is the criterion of the constitution.[xxv]

LS: Now this seems a very strange example, but it makes everything quite clear. You have the chorus serving in a tragedy, and then the same chorus serving in a comedy. It is a different chorus, although they are the same individuals, because the principle of composition and the purpose for which they are composed differs radically. Aristotle says this helps in understanding what constitutes the unity of the city above all. You see here, when you read especially the last sentence, Aristotle does not deny the continuity which we imply when we speak of the history of the British constitution from the time of Alfred the Great up to Elizabeth II, but he says it is the continuity of the *matter*: the English people generate other Englishmen. Furthermore, he does not say the sameness of the city depends only on the regime. That would be plainly absurd because if this were so, then

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[xxi] The reader has omitted the words "and shall we thus apply to the state the analogy of rivers and fountains, to which we ascribe a constant identity in spite of the fact that part of their water is always flowing in and part always flowing out?"
[xxii] Barker interpolates "[i.e. that the stock of the inhabitants continues to be the same]."
[xxiii] In Barker, the next paragraph begins with the interpolation "[The latter view carries the day.]"
[xxiv] Here Barker interpolates "[or scheme of its composition]."
[xxv] *Politics* 3.1276a34–b11.

all democracies would be a single regime. There wouldn't be *n* democracies. Through change of regimes, the city becomes another city [though] not simply. It also becomes some other things,[xxvi] for example, if all moved out and went to a new land, it would also be another city. But through change of regimes the city becomes another city in the most important respect, for it becomes a different regime regarding its end, the purpose to which it is dedicated. That is the most important consideration. No change is as important as the change from virtue to vice, or the reverse. What change can be compared to that in significance? It is of course not a different city in every respect, for example, not regarding treaty obligations, the difference with which he started. Aristotle does not give the answer explicitly here but it is obvious, for the very same reason that Aristotle was the same man. Since the tyrant made the obligation for the benefit of the city—after all, he might say: I want to adorn my capital, and the citizens like these beautiful streets and buildings—but if he incurred the debts in order to maintain a bodyguard which maltreated the citizens, then of course: "Let these foreign bastards who gave him the money see how they can get it."

Now we in our discussions today come across this question in a very simple thing, that is, the question of loyalty. What does loyalty mean? "To the United States" is not enough. A Communist could say: "I am loyal to the people of the United States. I want the best for them, and for this reason I wish to abolish the liberal democracy." Loyalty simply is loyalty to the established regime as characterized by the established regime. This question is illustrated in another manner by the question of citizenship. If we consider again the regime in which all men able to serve as heavy-armed infantrymen are citizens, it follows that the consideration of virtue comes in. But military virtue, that of the citizen soldier, while highly respectable, is not the complete virtue. And therefore we can visualize a still higher regime between democracy and oligarchy having the advantages of both but avoiding their disadvantage: and that is the rule of the virtuous men simply, and this is aristocracy. So this is more "quote realistic unquote," at least as revealing Aristotle's intention, than the other one.

This—that the mean, the middle, is higher than the extreme—is characteristic of the *Ethics* also. From a simple point of view, one doesn't see from our modern point of view why what is in the middle should be higher than the extremes, the reason being that the mean is not merely the arithmetic average but it has a different principle than the extremes: the principle of moderation, for example. Aristotle also says, without contradicting himself (and this had an effect of sorts in the last election), that the mean of any virtue compared to the two opposing vices is in a sense also an extreme—especially [LS writes on the blackboard] because it stands out. Virtue is an excellence: compared with the average, it is an extreme. This landed somehow in the acceptance speech of Senator Goldwater and gave people who didn't know Aristotle an occasion to be surprised.[xxvii] Yes?

[xxvi] "it also becomes some other things": suggest "it also depends on some other things"

[xxvii] A reference to the notorious line in Barry Goldwater's speech at the Republican convention in July 1964: "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice . . . moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." Goldwater was a U.S. Senator from Arizona and the Republican party nominee for

Student: In what sense is the aristocracy unlike the oligarchy?

LS: Because it avoids the mere principle of wealth and the mere principle of freedom. In other words, they must be between the two, while not deprived of either. But their title derives ultimately not from that great wealth on which the oligarchy relies, but from being a model for activity.

Student: In other words, the very fact that virtue is held to be an extreme seems to make aristocracy *more* than simply *in deed*, because it would be in deed only to the extent that virtue is dependent upon having to be upheld.

LS: But the point is this, [and] Aristotle does not make this in vain: you cannot understand virtue unless you see that it is essentially opposed to two extremes. For example, take the simple case of liberality. If you understand liberality as a virtue only in opposition to profligacy, you do not understand it. You must also see it in relation to, in opposition to, extreme stinginess. I mean, proceeding empirically, you see that. You say: A liberal man, a free spender. But is all free spending virtuous? Then you see some cases of wholly irresponsible playboys, and you say: No, there is also something in the middle. But the deeper reason why it is in the middle is not merely a statistical average, but because it has a higher principle than the principle of reasonableness, a consideration which is absent from the extremes. Yes, Mr. Wyatt?

Mr. Wyatt: In the other cases, the extremes are in some way intentional. Here it doesn't seem in any way that they are, or that aristocracy, while it may be a mean between extremes, is in any way at all a derivative from good influence, whereas in the case of liberality the beginning is . . .

LS: Well, you see, the discussion hitherto is of course provisional and not concrete enough. Look at it this way. What is virtue as Aristotle understands it, especially in the political context? Moral virtue as it is described in the *Ethics* requires equipment, *ektos* in Greek. Now what does this mean in plain English? You must have some money. For example, how can your liberality be visible if you do not have something to spare? You see, Aristotle is in this respect quite tough. He knows that among very poor people there can also be the virtues, but they are immanifest, they don't strike you. As an example of a liberal man, you would not, unless you are a kind of sophisticated novelist, give an example of two inmates of Skid Row. Aristotle does not doubt there is liberality also in Skid Row, but we would not seek our examples there just as we would not seek our examples of martial prowess in homes for people older than ninety. So there is a certain equipment needed, and therefore aristocracy requires some wealth. And similarly, he must be a free man, because he wouldn't have a ghost of a chance to be recognized as a ruler if he were a slave or even a freedman.

President in the 1964 election. It may be noted that an older student of Strauss, Harry V. Jaffa, is commonly credited with inserting this line, adapted from Cicero, into Goldwater's speech.

Student: Is there something[17] besides the mere fact that they are prerequisites, I mean, is there any common characteristic that makes . . .

LS: No, only this, that the matter with which they deal enters into the higher levels, the matter of wealth, and the other, of freedom. In the lower cases, the matter is not transfigured from a higher point of view, and they remain therefore in simple opposition. Here are the merely free men; here are those who are in addition also rich; and both considerations are not sufficient. What the so-called realistic men try to do is of course to get rid of virtue. The word "virtue" has become so ridiculous that it is a kind of snobbery, I believe, to use it, at least in certain circles. But why not forget about it and speak only of the rich and the poor, or, with Mr. Lasswell, who gets what and when? The trouble is that even if you want to be completely down to earth, you have to bring in, in a strictly subservient fashion, the virtues. I mean, however down to earth you may be, you would prefer in a pinch to be judged by a just jury, by a just judge, and you would like to have civil servants perfectly immune to bribes on the part of these goof-pill sellers—is this the proper expression? [laughter]—and you know that. Even Lasswell has to bring in such concepts as integrity and other considerations. That the virtues are needed in a subservient, instrumental fashion if society is not to go to pieces is not too difficult to prove, and I believe it would be readily admitted.

The key question, then is this: Can virtue be understood as merely instrumental? That is the divisive[xxviii] issue on the theoretical plane. If virtue is only a means for the well-being of civil society, then the benefit of civil society alone determines the use or nonuse of virtue. That was Machiavelli's doctrine: you are virtuous when it is good for your community, but if not—when it is bad—then you are vicious. These considerations, more nobly expressed in the form in which they were by Augustine: Is there not a difference between a gang of robbers and civil society? Because you know there is also a certain morality in a gang of robbers. They would not last for one day if there were not a certain trust that each will get his share and that if you have a contract, as I believe they call it—that someone will be transported to a safe place until the whole thing has blown over and other niceties—it will be kept. What Augustine means of course by saying that civil society differs from a gang of robbers is that it is more consistent in trying to be virtuous than a gang of robbers, who take very narrow views of the virtue which they demand.[xxix] But above all, that virtue must be not merely instrumental but the purpose of civil society, this is Aristotle's view. But there is nothing wrong in starting from the lowest view and simply saying: Dog eats dog, the rich eat poor and vice versa, and let us see where we come from there. There is only group politics, no one cares for the common good, the common good is simply the outcome of power relations between the various groups. But [then] you will only be able to account for a limited range of phenomena.

In this respect, the same difficulties come out with the simplest view of citizenship as defined by birth from citizen parents, and grandparents, and so on. Carried far enough, it would follow that the first citizens, the founding fathers, were not citizens. This is the most absurd thing to imagine, that the parents of George Washington were not American

[xxviii] "divisive": suggest "decisive"

[xxix] The reference appears to be to Augustine's *City of God*, part 4, book 4 ff.

citizens. But when Aristotle points to this, he uses the opportunity to make something else clear. The joke of Gorgias, the famous teacher of rhetoric, he says, is this: that "Larissa-makers" means in the first place the people who generate citizens: parents. But it has also a double meaning because in the case of naturalization, for example, there the Larissa-makers are magistrates who naturalize the citizens. So whereas in the first place citizenship seems to be something entirely natural, as natural as generation—being generated by a human father and a human mother—in the second place we see it can be something entirely dependent on law, entirely conventional. That this view is in a sense more true becomes clear if we reflect about the fact, pointed out by Aristotle, that who is or is not a citizen depends not on nature simply but on the regime. This throws some light on the character of the city: the city is by nature, yet not simply, and this follows clearly from the fact that every city must have a form, a regime. And the variety of regimes leads him to the question: Which of these regimes, if any, can be said to be natural? In the extreme case, if no regime can be said to be simply natural, then the city is as much conventional as it is natural. But there may be the possibility that there is a single regime, the only one according to nature, which would mean that the others are not natural, that they are forms of political sickness.

Now hitherto we have seen that the regime is a form of the *polis*. All things have their forms, their shape, their characters: horses, dogs, oak trees, and so on. When they lose their form, they cease to be. If you have ever seen a living being in a state of advanced decay, say, a rabbit, you will know what I mean. Furthermore, these forms are not changeable. A horse cannot take on the character of a dog, except in Arabian tales. But here we come to another consideration. The same city can have successively different regimes—in other words, a kind of miracle, that something which has been a cat becomes a dog. These changes of regimes are now popularly called *revolutions*. The question is: How deep do these changes go? Let us remind ourselves of the thesis of the democrats, whom we have heard: Not the *polis* did it, but the tyrant; while the tyrant ruled, there was no *polis*. The houses were there, the matter was there, the human beings, but there was not a *polis*, a commonwealth. But when we speak today of English constitutional history, for instance, we imply there always was England. The same substance remained despite the changes it underwent. It was feudal, absolute monarchy, constitutional monarchy with a kind of oligarchy, and then democracy, but the same England, the same substance, remained despite the changes: the same land, the same fatherland. One needs to spell that out, and that you still need a government instead of a computer to do that is quite interesting and seems to have something to do with the fact that man is still in a sense understood to be a rational animal.

The key point regarding the number of rulers: there is the rule of one, of few, and of many. There is not any rule of all. That has extraordinary implications. There is always the rule of a part or of a combination of parts. Such a combination is this kind of rich may go together with that kind of poor—you can easily figure out for yourself. The rule of a combination of parts would be a mixed regime. Aristotle has referred to this already in the second book when speaking of Sparta and other things. This question of the mixed regime became historically relevant for the United States, as you see from *Federalist* 10.

What I wish to discuss next time is this question: Can we learn anything from Aristotle's schema for the variety of regimes toward the understanding of modern democracy? That we can learn something in general, namely, that the concern of *regime*, and not the very vague word "power" is that which is a peculiarly political phenomenon—this I think I have shown. Because power—there is electrical power, there is the power of the chief rooster in the yard, there is that of a nasty husband over his wife, and vice versa: these are all wholly uninteresting politically. The peculiar thing is the regime. This is obviously sound and very topical, but if we turn to our more immediate task, that is connected with the question of democracy. So the point which I would like to take up next time is: Can we learn from Aristotle something about a democracy?

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[1] Deleted "how."
[2] Deleted "the difference."
[3] Deleted "that."
[4] Deleted "they are."
[5] Deleted "this shows us."
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[9] Deleted "That is, as."
[10] Deleted "of many."
[11] Deleted "and here there."
[12] Deleted "Democracy—well."
[13] Deleted "You know."
[14] Deleted "You know."
[15] Deleted "The partisan says, there is no polis, if the right kind of regime is not established."
[16] Deleted "that."
[17] Deleted "behind."

Session 13: no date

Aristotle, *Politics*, book 3

Leo Strauss: [In progress] —of which Aristotle did not even dream. Think of communism and fascism. So you had to consider this question for one moment: how far Aristotle's specific analyses of regimes are relevant for our understanding of the regimes with which we are confronted today. And I limit myself to the question of democracy.

Now Aristotle defines democracy as a regime directed toward the benefit of the poor. "Poor" does not mean here what it means in President Johnson's "war against poverty"[i]; [1]it means those who have to earn their living. The distinction is clearly made in Aristophanes's comedy *Ploutos*, literally translated *Wealth*. Poverty as a woman appears defending poverty against the claims of wealth, and she emphasizes the fact that the poor are those who, like the farmers, have to earn their living; and the others, the beggars, are of course not even considered.

To repeat, Aristotle defines democracy as a regime directed toward the benefit of the poor and[2] indifferent to the common good, i.e., the good of all citizens. Now this is quite shocking to us but, on the other hand, not unintelligible. Now we have heard in modern democracies expressions like "milking the rich" through inheritance taxes and progressive income taxes. We have heard, although this may very well be apocryphal, "we tax, we tax, and we tax; we spend, we spend, and we spend; and we elect, we elect, and we elect." This is ascribed to Harry Hopkins, probably untrue.[ii] Now we solve the difficulty by assuming that the common good, with which every decent society must be concerned, consists in the greatest happiness of the greatest number. And then of course we have the democratic implication immediately. Or to use the formula well known from the *Communist Manifesto*: a movement of the great majority on behalf of the great majority—of course, against the exploiters of the toilers.[iii] This is in a way a solution.

Now can this analysis of democracy as Aristotle presents it be of any relevance for a discussion of present-day democracy?[3] What do we understand by democracy? We do not take these extreme statements to which I referred. Let us consider Lincoln's: "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." Now what is the key point here? Government *for* the people—that goes without saying here. This is of course also

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[i] The "war on poverty" refers to initiatives, announced by President Johnson in his State of the Union Address in January 1964, "not only to relieve the symptoms of poverty, but to cure it and, above all, to prevent it." These included Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, the expansion of social security benefits for retirees, and financial subsidies for elementary and secondary school districts that contained sizeable percentages of impoverished children.

[ii] Harry Lloyd Hopkins (1890-1946), close aide to President Franklin Roosevelt and architect of the New Deal. He is alleged to have uttered the words, "we will spend and spend, and tax and tax, and elect and elect."

[iii] "The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority." Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1906), 30.

true of absolute monarchy, according to its claim, or enlightened despotism—paternally taking care of the people. Government *of* the people is entirely different. It implies the ultimate sovereignty of the people, i.e., the exclusion of kingship by the grace of God. Government is not due to an act of divine grace as such, but to the people. The people may delegate government to a king, or to a king and Parliament. This view is familiar to all of you, of course, from your school days, because that is the view stated on the first page of the Declaration of Independence. In case anyone has forgotten it, I remind you of it.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government [that is, the same people who originally established it—LS], laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

Now the implication of the whole attack, of the long list of grievances, is that the British king and Parliament have lost their claim to rule[4] because of these terrible things—quartering soldiers, and taxation without representation, and the other points—but it is of course implied that the government itself was legitimate. It became illegitimate by the tyrannical use of the power. The Declaration of Independence is perfectly compatible with constitutional monarchy in the eighteenth-century sense, or with king and Parliament. The peculiarly democratic element of Lincoln's famous statement is "government *by* the people," meaning the people governs itself . . . which it wouldn't do in a constitutional monarchy, where the king and Parliament govern. In other words, it is implied there is no government distinct from the people. The people governs itself through men of the people, who come from the people and return to it after very short tenures of office. There is no one who governs in a democracy in his own right, but only by virtue of delegation and election. In other words, the government is not a different breed from the ruled, as it would be in the case of a nobility, where they are a different breed from the commoners, [and where] there is always a difference between the government and the people; there is no self-government of the people strictly understood. To say there is no government distinct from the people is a proposition only literally true if one identifies the government with the legislative, deliberative part of the government as distinct from the executive or the magistrates, and if the legislative–deliberative part consists of the whole citizen body assembled. Is this clear? In that case you can say government of the people, self-government literally understood: no distinction between government and the people because government by laws is the deliberative part, the legislative part, and this is the people. The town meeting, for example. In contradistinction to any representatives of the people, or in contradistinction to parliamentary democracy, the Lincolnian formula draws our attention to direct democracy as the democracy par excellence.

From this it follows that modern democracy, even in Lincoln's time of course, is not truly democratic. Now this view of democracy has been attacked frequently and is still being attacked as misleading, because it is based on what people call a romantic conception of democracy in contradistinction to a realistic one. The word "romantic" can here be understood to have precise meaning because the theorist of direct democracy was Rousseau, and Rousseau is the father of romanticism, one can say.

Now what is the meaning of this criticism of the romantic conception of democracy? A very well-known fact, that people cannot govern themselves but must have leaders. It is added, there are always actual or potential leaders around, elites, and, negatively stated, the phenomenon of electoral apathy shows how little you can count on self-government of the people in a strict sense. A very well-known representative of this view, Robert Michels, has spoken of the "iron law of oligarchy," which means there is never a democracy.[iv] So always an oligarchy rules: if you have absolute monarchy there is a clique around the king because very few things can be done by the king himself, and in democracy there is also an oligarchy, or rather a number of oligarchies competing with each other.

Now the so-called realistic concept embodies notions which were originally advanced by critics or opponents of democracy, by people who tried to show that democracy in any strict sense, self-government of the people, is impossible. While the romantic notion is based on a fantastic notion of equality, namely, that all are equally capable of being leaders, the realistic notion claims to recognize the crucial importance of inequality: for what else does the emphasis on leadership mean but the recognition of the crucial importance of inequality? There is a simple example: one of the best-known radical democrats a generation ago was Henry Wallace, and he was particularly concerned with "the Common Man," a phrase which he liked to use. And his biographer called the story of his life *An Uncommon Man*.[v] So in other words, precisely if you want to have the rule of the common man, this rule will not work except through uncommon men. You cannot have equality except via inequality.

Up to this point [. . .][vi] the present-day view that the Lincolnian conception of democracy is romantic or fantastic—which is now, I take it, preponderant for modern political science—up to this point it is sound. Yet one can also not deny the fact that modern democracy is in fact and not merely in its aspiration or claim egalitarian, and if one does not consider the other side, the criticism remains wrong. Tocqueville's famous book on democracy in America has exactly this thesis, as you know: that there is an egalitarian movement from the late Middle Ages on which is ever increasing in power. A simple

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[iv] Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: The Free Press, 1962).

[v] Henry A. Wallace (1888-1965) was FDR's Secretary of Agriculture (1933–1940) and Vice President (1941–1945). He later ran as the Progressive Party candidate in the 1948 presidential election and was a prominent critic from the left of Truman's Soviet policy. The title referred to here is Frank Kingdon, *An Uncommon Man: Henry Wallace and 60 Million Jobs* (New York: Readers Press, 1945).

[vi] The transcript has a blank space here.

example which everyone knows: in a democracy strictly understood, there cannot be any hereditary aids or privileges to public power, no abridgment of rights on account of birth,[5] [nor] on account of sex,[6] [nor] of race. Here we see the clear egalitarian view. To this extent, present-day democracy still asserts, differing from what the Declaration of Independence explicitly says, all men are by nature equal. The differences due to birth, like family, sex, race, are irrelevant. Hence one man, one vote, which is still admitted today, is a necessary consequence of that egalitarianism.[7] In other words, present-day representatives of democracy are much more democratic than the earlier representatives were. But in one respect they are less democratic in the strict sense. This shows itself in the emphasis on political inequalities, meaning the inequalities of the leaders and the led. But this is justified from the democratic point of view by the demand that the political inequalities should correspond to the natural inequalities, say, to the inequality of talents, and of course also of the cultivation of the talents.

So it is misleading to contrast the *now-prevailing* view of democracy as a realistic view to the *older* view as a romantic or idealistic one. There is as much idealism in the now-prevailing view of democracy as there was in the older one, but a different kind of ideal. The democratic ideal has changed. The present-day radical democrats are not interested in the closest approximation to the rule of the simple people, but rather in a transformation of the simple people: making them more educated and so on. Incidentally, the public opinion polls, which are apart from the legal institutions which were devised, like referenda, are also a means[8] [of bringing] about government of, by, and for the people. A government which would listen in all cases to the public opinion polls would truly be government by the people, by the majority. Since the public opinion polls are a part of present-day democracy as it has developed in the last generation, in this respect the older view of the approximation to direct democracy is still very powerful.

Now to return to Aristotle. He surely did not know of modern democracy in either form,[9] [nor] of the intrademocratic modern controversies. He knew only of the democracy of the Greeks. But modern democracy and Greek democracy have something in common, which is not negligible. In the first place, no property qualifications. And that means that modern democracy as well as ancient democracy is by itself rule of the poor in the sense defined. In one respect classical democracy is more democratic than modern democracy, but in another respect, it is less democratic. That it is less democratic is shown by the institution of slavery, and no one seriously considered political rights for women. But in other respects, it was more democratic, as no one made clearer than Aristotle. Aristotle describes as a specific democratic institution election by lot, in contradistinction to election by raising the hand, as it were. The latter means voting for candidates—whether secret or open doesn't make any difference. Election by lot: Why is that more democratic than by raising the hand? Yes?

Student: Because by lot it makes no difference who wins the election, every man in the election is equal.

LS: In other words, the chance of becoming president of the United States, if there were election by lot, is equally great for everyone. People who could not possibly get

themselves elected as dogcatchers have as great a chance. That is in one sense very democratic. But if we state it as a principle, election by lot means actual equality, the maximum of equality regarding the occupation of ruling offices. Needless to say,[10] classical democracy was not absolutely egalitarian in this respect. Two kinds of offices especially, generals and treasurers, had to be voted personally because if a notorious drifter and wastrel would have become treasurer by virtue of the lot, that would be terrible; or if someone completely inept became a general, that would be the same. But wherever feasible, election by lot; whereas in modern times, generally prevailing, election of candidates.

Now the notion underlying election of candidates is simply this: You can *look* at your man for whom you vote and, if you are public-spirited, you will vote for the man who is most worthy of the position or is most able. You will consider merit, whereas election by lot does not consider merit but merely the fact that you are a citizen, a freeman; and therefore, Aristotle says, the election by raising the hands, what we call election, is based on an aristocratic principle, on the principle that the best should rule. Modern democracy is from an Aristotelian point of view a mixture of democracy and aristocracy because of this fact. The elected representatives are supposed to be the elite, the cream of the population. I think it becomes very clear from the *Federalist* papers that this was the original intention. This has certain implications.

Now modern democracy is, as one says, representative or parliamentary. And the notion developed with great force and gravity in the *Federalist* papers is that this is necessary in large states.[vii] Direct democracy belongs to small states and governments, but a large state, in having a representative assembly, requires a great improvement in communication, naturally. Or to put it on a somewhat broader basis, enormous technological advances, which did not exist in classical antiquity, and these technological advances were due at least partly to the advance of modern science. So if one would develop this theme fully, we can say that modern democracy belongs to a type of regime wholly unknown to Aristotle because it is based indirectly, but importantly, on modern science. But what is true of[11] modern democracy is of course also true of modern communism and fascism. So these regimes which we know from our lifetime are fundamentally distinct from the regimes known to Aristotle by the fact that modern science is directly or indirectly presupposed in these specifically modern regimes. So the minimum change which we must make in the Aristotelian arrangement—you remember the six which we had last time [LS writes on the blackboard]—is a new type. For liberal democracy, communism and fascism are radically distinguished from all six by the power of science and modern technology, a thing which had no direct equivalent in classical antiquity. We will come back to that later. But all the more I emphasize the following: these more complex regimes, which we know from our century, cannot be properly understood except through contrast with the simple forms discussed by Aristotle.

Aristotle's analysis of these simple regimes, these six, must still form the basis of the scientific analysis of all regimes, and in particular of those which we know from the present day. One historical point I would like to add. Closer inspection might show that

[vii] See *Federalist* numbers 10 and 14.

classical democracy, Athenian democracy, is not as unqualifiedly democratic as the democracy defined by Aristotle. In other words, Aristotle presents democracy according to what it claims to be or what it aspires to be, and not as it actually was in Athens. We must therefore make a distinction between what we may call the philosophic concept of democracy and the historical concept of democracy as it arises from the study of the actual institutions and working of Athenian democracy. By the philosophic concept I do not mean something like an ideal type in the sense of Max Weber, an ideal type being a convenient construct and nothing else. For when Aristotle speaks of democracy, he spells out what democracy explicitly intends to be, and whether it achieves it in practice is another story. In other words, it is not a construct of Aristotle, but it is a thinking through of what democracy itself claims to be or to achieve. The philosophic concept of democracy which we find in Aristotle takes democracy as it were by its word: You claim that, this is what you imply. It understands it in terms of what democracy intends or wishes to be. This is not a peculiarity of Aristotle, but simply necessary if one wishes to achieve clarity about political things. The historical concept of Athenian democracy is ordinarily based, especially the more popular presentation, on the peak of classical democracy, i.e., democracy under Pericles. And there is one and only one piece of literature to which everyone will turn in order to find out what Periclean democracy is, and as I see from the understanding smile of some of you, I don't have to say what that is . . . because Mr. Levy will say it.

Mr. Levy: Surely I'm no substitute for you, Mr. Strauss.

LS: Pardon?

Mr. Levy: Thucydides's book on the Peloponnesian War.

LS: The *funeral speech* which occurs in Thucydides's account of the Peloponnesian War. But this is not a good procedure because Thucydides, after all, who knew best what he understood by the funeral speech,[12] having composed it [himself], did not think that Periclean Athens was a democracy. He explicitly says it was a democracy only in name, but in fact the rule of the first man. In other words, Thucydides did not pay too-great attention to the fact that democratic institutions of course survived under Pericles, because all substantive decisions were made in fact by the first man, Pericles. If one wants to know what Thucydides understands by a democracy in fact, one has to study his presentation of the post-Periclean democracy—Cleon, and so on—or still better, the speech of a Syracusan leader of democracy, Athenagoras, in the sixth book, chapters 36 to 40. But this only in order to warn you against a very facile misunderstanding.[viii]

[viii] Cleon was one of the so-called "new politicians" who came to power in Athens after the death of Pericles in 429 B.C.E He was clearly held in contempt by our two main sources for his character and activities, Thucydides (books 3–5) and the playwright Aristophanes (the *Knights*). Athenagoras is otherwise unknown. Pericles's funeral speech is at Thucydides 2.35–46; Thucydides's commentary on Periclean democracy ("rule of the first man") is at 2.65. For Pericles in Thucydides generally, see 1.139–2.65.

Let us now continue in our study of Aristotle with book 3, which, to repeat, is the central book of the *Politics*, and if one has understood the first book, as we cannot even attempt here, one has understood Aristotle's political teaching. We have learned, to repeat, that the most important consideration concerns the regime, and how many good and bad regimes there are. But there is also a popular opinion, an accepted opinion, according to which the best regime would be mixed. Then the question arises: Mixed of what kind of simple regimes, and in what proportion or manner should they be mixed? This means that we still stand at the beginning of the whole inquiry. Let us turn to 1281a34.

Reader:
Is it better than any of the other alternatives that the one best man should rule? This is still more oligarchical than the rule of the wealthy few or the few of the better sort,[ix] because the number of those debarred from honors is even greater. It may perhaps be urged that there is still another alternative; that it is a poor sort of policy to vest sovereignty in any person or body of persons,[x] subject as persons are to the passions that beset men's souls; and that it is better to vest it in law. But this does not solve the difficulty.[xi] The law itself may incline towards oligarchy or towards democracy; and what difference will the sovereignty of law then make in the problems which have just been raised? The consequences already stated will follow just the same.[xii]

LS: It doesn't come out clearly enough in the translation, but the point Aristotle makes might be stated as follows. Someone might say: Your whole discussion, Aristotle, is wrong, because you speak of regimes, i.e., the rule of this or that kind of human being. All rule of human beings is wrong: we ought to have rule of laws. A notion with which we are all familiar. Now Aristotle's answer is very simply this: What *kind* of laws? Laws have to be made, framed, adopted, and which laws you adopt will depend on the regime. A democracy will have different laws from an oligarchy, and so on, and so it is no use to say "no rule of men but rule of laws." This is a metaphorical expression which, properly understood, is very sound, but it is a metaphorical expression. Literally, it cannot be true. The fundamental political question cannot be a legal question. Laws are secondary. We have heard in Aristotle's critique of Hippodamus, in the second book, that laws lack the evidence or the rationality of the arts and sciences. We may suggest this connection between the remark here and what we read in book 2: since most regimes are in fact defective and hence based on untrue assumptions of one kind or another, most laws, being dependent on the regime, lack evidence. If the basis is questionable, what is derivative of it will also be questionable.

Now Aristotle begins the inquiry proper with these words, in 1280a5 or so (book 3, chapter 9):

Reader:

[ix] The words "[than the rule of the wealthy few or the few of the better sort]" are bracketed in Barker.
[x] Barker indicates that "[or body of persons]" is an interpolation.
[xi] This sentence is contained in brackets in Barker.
[xii] *Politics* 3.1281a32–39.

We must next ascertain what are the distinctive principles attributed by their advocates to oligarchy and democracy,[xiii] and what are the oligarchical and democratic conceptions of justice.[xiv]

LS: Now Barker is again, for very respectable reasons—because he wants to help the reader—avoiding Aristotle's terseness. One can also become too talkative and miss the clear lines: "Let us take first what limits they give, what characterizations they give, of oligarchy and democracy [he doesn't necessarily mean what the advocates of either say, but only what people say—LS] and what the oligarchic and the democratic justice is." Again understood: just as oligarchic laws are not democratic laws, there is also a democratic notion of justice, which is not the oligarchic notion. We cannot assume that people always agree in political matters as to what justice is. But this most obvious beginning is that he speaks only of oligarchy and democracy. Why does he do that? Because oligarchy and democracy are the most common forms of regime; and Aristotle does not regard this as any accident—he bows to that. Go on now.

Reader:
For all[xv] have a hold on a sort of conception of justice; but they both fail to carry it far enough, and neither of them expresses the true conception of justice in the whole of its range.[xvi]

LS: In other words, each of them has some understanding of justice. It is not simply fiction what they say about justice. But they don't go far enough: each concept of justice is one-sided. And Aristotle claims that if one goes the whole way, then one gets a full concept of justice, in which justice is done to both the democratic and oligarchic concepts. Aristotle does not begin, as you see, with the institutional or social basis, but with their claim. And the claim means what they understand by justice. For we are concerned with the best regime, and even the defective regimes claim to be the best. This claim must be met.

Reader:
In democracies, for example, justice is considered to mean equality in the distribution of office.[xvii] It does mean equality—but equality for those who are equal, and not for all. In oligarchies, again, inequality in the distribution of office is considered to be just; and indeed it is—but only for those who are unequal, and not for all. The advocates of oligarchy and democracy both refuse to consider this factor—who are the persons to whom their principles properly apply—and they both make erroneous judgments. The reason is that they are judging *in their own case*; and most men, as a rule, are bad judges where their own interests are involved. Justice is relative to persons; and a just distribution is one in which the relative values of the things given correspond to those of

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[xiii] The reader omits the interpolation "[now that we have discovered the social ground on which they rest]."
[xiv] *Politics* 3.1280a7–9.
[xv] "For all": Barker has "Both oligarchs and democrats."
[xvi] 3.1280a9–11.
[xvii] The words "[in the distribution of office]" are presented as an interpolation in Barker.

the persons receiving—a point which has already been made in the *Ethics*.[xviii] But the advocates of oligarchy and democracy, while they agree about what constitutes equality in the *thing*, disagree about what constitutes it in *persons*. The main reason for this is the reason just stated—they are judging, and judging erroneously, in their own case; but there is also another reason—they are misled by the fact that they are professing a sort of conception of justice, and professing it up to a point, into thinking that they profess one which is absolute and complete. The oligarchs think that superiority on one point—in their case wealth—means superiority on all: the democrats believe that equality in one respect—for instance, that of free birth—means equality all around.[xix]

LS: In other words, the insufficiency of both the democratic and the oligarchic view of justice is obvious according to Aristotle, because equality in some respects does not mean equality in all respects; inequality in some respects does not mean inequality in all respects. The two respects here are free birth and wealth. Now how can you decide between these two? And how can we discover that overriding consideration which is neither wealth nor free birth as such? That is made clear in the immediate sequel. "The most important thing these people do not say. For if men had come together for the sake of property"—do you have that?

Reader:
If property were the end for which men came together and formed an association, men's share in the offices and honors[xx] of the city would be proportional to their share of property; and in that case the argument of the oligarchical side—that it is not just for a man who has contributed one pound to share equally in a sum of a hundred pounds (or, for that matter, in the interest accruing upon that sum) with the man who has contributed all the rest—[xxi]

LS: In other words, if civil society were a trade or moneymaking arrangement of sorts, then the oligarchs would be perfectly right. But that is not the purpose of the polis. Similar considerations apply to the democratic argument. We do not have to read that. Both democrats and oligarchs forget the purpose of political life, which is not acquisition, nor mere life or self-defense, but the good life, the noble life, the life of human excellence. A city is not a city, it is only a defective city, if it is not concerned with the moral character of its associates. And from this, crucial consequences follow. Let us turn [still in book 3] to 1280b35.

Reader:
The end and purpose of a *polis* is the good life, and the institutions of social life are means to that end. A *polis* is constituted by the association of families and villages in a

[xviii] The reader omits the interpolation "[It follows that a just distribution of offices among a number of different persons will involve a consideration of the personal values, or merits, of each of those persons.]"
[xix] 3.1280a11–25.
[xx] Barker indicates that "[in the offices and honors] is an interpolation."
[xxi] 3.1280a25–31.

perfect and self-sufficing existence; and such an existence, on our definition, consists in a life of true felicity and goodness.

It is therefore for the sake of good actions, and not for the sake of social life, that political associations must be considered to exist.[xxii]

LS: Yes. More precisely, "for the sake of *noble* actions." There is a certain difference between "good" and "noble" of which we may have occasion to speak.

Reader:
Those who contribute most to an association of this character[xxiii] have a greater share in the *polis*[xxiv] than those who are equal to them (or even greater) in free birth and descent, but unequal in civic excellence, or than those who surpass them in wealth but are surpassed by them in excellence.[xxv]

LS: So in other words, the claim of the oligarchy and democracy is ruled out here very simply but provisionally on this ground: the city's highest purpose is the good life, i.e., the noble life. Hence the men of noble deeds and noble character have much more claim to rule than the rich as rich and the freemen as freemen. But can these men of virtue have the sole claim? Or is this not precisely the predicament of the city, that it must give way to the claims of those who from the highest point of view do not deserve them? This may be a very bad necessity, but it is a necessity. Let us read on from where we were.

Reader:
From what has been said it is plain that both sides to the dispute about constitutions i.e. both the democratic and the oligarchical side[xxvi] profess only a partial conception of justice.

A difficulty arises when we turn to consider what body of men[xxvii] should be sovereign in the *polis*:[xxviii] the people at large; the wealthy; the better sort of men; the one man who is best of all; the tyrant. But all these alternatives appear to involve unpleasant results: indeed, how can it be otherwise?[xxix] What if the poor, on the ground of their being a majority, proceed to divide among themselves the possessions of the wealthy—will not this be unjust? "No, by Zeus"[xxx] (a democrat may reply)—[xxxi]

[xxii] The reader drops the interpolation "[This conclusion enables us to attain a proper conception of justice.]" Ibid., 3.1280b39–1281a4.
[xxiii] Barker adds here the interpolation "[i.e. who contribute most to good action]."
[xxiv] Barker interpolates "[and should therefore, in justice, receive a larger recognition from it]."
[xxv] 3.1281a4–8.
[xxvi] "[I.e. both the democratic and the oligarchical side]" is Barker's interpolation.
[xxvii] In the place of "men" Barker has "persons."
[xxviii] The reader omits the interpolation "[We can imagine five alternatives]."
[xxix] Barker interpolates here "[Take, for example, the first alternative.]"
[xxx] Barker renders the oath "by heaven."
[xxxi] 3.1281a8–16.

LS: "Democrat" is of course not in Aristotle. "Of course, by Zeus, the sovereign, the ruler, decided it justly"—"justly" meaning "in due form."[xxxii] The people assembled decided to confiscate the property of the rich. That is extremely—the quotation marks which you find here are of course not in Aristotle, but the oath, which is in the text, is quite striking. This is one of the *two cases* in which you find an oath in Aristotle, and the other comes very soon. That is quite interesting.

In order to make this clear, in passing, in Plato's dialogues there are many oaths, and even various oaths: by Zeus, by Hera—Socrates likes to vow by a woman or by a goddess—or by Apollo and others. In Aristotle, so to speak, never, except in the *Politics*. How would you explain that? Well, let us take the simplest example: a demonstration of a mathematical proposition. Do you use oaths there? I mean, the demonstration is in no way affected by the addition of an oath. Either it is demonstrated or it is not demonstrated. But if it is matter of fact, and especially of controversial fact, oaths are of some importance. It shows at least at first glance that the man who says "by Zeus" believes it very strongly. Not necessarily, because he may be a liar, but still there is some presumption. So in other words, when things are controversial and human passions are involved, they swear. And political debate is passionate debate. It is quite interesting, then, that only in Aristotle's *Politics* among all his works do we find oaths.

Reader:
But if this is not the extreme of injustice,[xxxiii] what is?[xxxiv]

LS: Now Aristotle develops this at great length. All these kinds of men—the multitude, the wealthy, the gentlemen, the single man who surpasses all others in goodness, and the tyrant—they all raise claims. And each is convinced that his claim is obviously reasonable. The people confiscate the property of the rich. Of course it is right: the *dēmos*, the sovereign, decided it in a legal manner. But Aristotle says: Look, that means they take away property merely on the basis of the fact that they have the power. What does the tyrant do?[13] Can you leave it at that? Now what is the outcome of all this? Democracy, tyranny, and oligarchy are all bad because they absolutize the right of a part, whose interests are not identical with the interests of the whole. The *dēmos*, by destroying the wealth, destroys itself and the *polis*, and therefore it cannot be good. The action of the *dēmos* against the rich is as coercive as that of the tyrant. But what about the gentleman, the good man?

Reader:
Should the better sort of men have authority and be sovereign in all matters? In that case, the rest of the citizens will necessarily be debarred from honors, since they will not enjoy the honor of holding civic office. We speak of offices as honors; and when a single set of persons hold office permanently, the rest of the community must necessarily be debarred from all honors.[xxxv]

[xxxii] Evidently Strauss's own translation of the sequel to the longer quotation.
[xxxiii] The reader omits "(we may reply in turn)."
[xxxiv] *Politics* 3.1281a16–17.
[xxxv] 3.1281a28–32.

LS: So in other words, the people of defective decency, those who are not gentlemen, are debarred from honors if only the gentlemen rule. But do they deserve honor? At first glance, of course not. But what is Aristotle's point? Why must they be given some power in spite of that? Let us go on.

Reader:
Is it better than any of the other alternatives that the one best man should rule? This is still more oligarchical,[xxxvi] because the number of those debarred from office[xxxvii] is even greater.[xxxviii]

LS: In other words, all others are dishonored. They have no access to honor by position.

Reader:
It may perhaps be urged that there is still another alternative; that it is a poor sort of policy to vest sovereignty in one person or body of persons,[xxxix] subject as persons are to the passions that beset men's souls; and that it is better to vest it in law.[xl] The law itself may incline either towards oligarchy or towards democracy; and what difference will the sovereignty of law then make in the problems which have just been raised? The consequences already stated will follow just the same.

The other alternatives may be reserved for a later inquiry; but the first of the alternatives suggested—that the people at large should be sovereign rather than the few best—would appear to be defensible, and while it presents some difficulty it perhaps also contains some truth.[xli]

LS: Now what Aristotle means by the rule of laws, we have discussed before. The laws are in a way even more virtuous than the gentlemen, because there is no gentleman who doesn't make some mistake from time to time. But the laws have no passion; therefore should they not rule? But we know why they cannot: because they have no power. This applies retroactively also to the gentlemen, whose power is too small to rule the city. We have to make this disgraceful concession, because we have to make concessions to sheer power. That is the argument up to this point. Now Aristotle must change the argument radically. And since, from the point of view of sheer brachial power, the many are much more powerful than the few rich, we have to consider much more seriously the claims of democracy. And therefore the ensuing discussion leads up to a qualified argument in favor of democracy.

[xxxvi] The reader omits the interpolation "[than the rule of the wealthy few or the few of the better sort]."
[xxxvii] Barker has not "office" but "honors."
[xxxviii] 3.1281a32–34.
[xxxix] The words "[or body of persons]" are presented as an interpolation in Barker.
[xl] Barker interpolates here "[But this does not solve the difficulty.]"
[xli] 1281a34–42.

It is very interesting: we have here a case made for democracy, not for oligarchy, although from a formal point of view they seem to be equally bad. Aristotle develops here at length that the many may be superior to the few gentlemen in virtue and understanding by virtue of a kind of summative process: they are assembled in meeting and each gives his might, each hears the arguments, and the net result may be a higher collective wisdom than the wisdom of any individual by himself. Aristotle makes here a qualification in the sequel: 1280b15.

Reader:
It is not clear, however, that this combination of qualities, which we have made the ground of distinction between the many and the few best, is true of all popular bodies and all large masses of men. Perhaps it may be said, "By Zeus,[xlii] it is clear that there are some bodies of which it cannot possibly be true; for if you included them"—

LS: Yet again, another sermon where we do not know—surely not the democrat because there is an antidemocratic bent. Either by the oligarch or by Aristotle; this is a nice ambiguity here.

Reader:
For if you included them, you would by necessity be bound to include a herd of beasts.[xliii]

LS: The argument in favor of the *dēmos*—its collective virtue and wisdom may be superior to the virtue of any individual, however virtuous and wise—cannot be true of every *dēmos*. It must be a specially educated one. Aristotle leads then up to a conclusion: Yes, that is all right, that makes sense. But on one thing he must insist: the many,[14] if they are of this good kind of *dēmos*,[15] must fully participate in deliberating and judging—that is democracy—but they cannot be admitted to the ruling magistrates, because here not the *dēmos* assembled, with its collective wisdom, but only the individual with his very poor judgment enters. Yet a new difficulty arises. The many are understood to be, as individuals, ignoramuses, non-knowers. Can the non-knowers be judges of the knowers? For example, a physician is to be appointed. Who can judge of his competence? Only physicians. Engineers, fortification experts—same story. But this speaks against democracy. Democracy must then delegate an enormous part of its power to a nondemocratic body. Aristotle gives this way out: on certain things the non-knowers are as good judges or even better judges than the experts, namely, insofar as the user is a better judge than the maker. Whatever a carpenter[16] or a collegium of carpenters may tell you about the excellence of a bed, if when you lie on it you can't find sleep because of the unevenness, this layman's judgment is better than what the experts say. So in other words, there is a large region in which everyone with his ordinary common sense is as good a judge as any expert.[xliv] —under certain conditions, if you have a *dēmos* of a certain character, democracy is perfectly all right, as all the arguments taken from wisdom and virtue, which at first glance seem to speak against democracy, speak in favor of democracy. Reasonable lovers of democracy must be perfectly satisfied—that is one

[xlii] Barker translates the oath "by heaven."
[xliii] In the place of "by necessity" Barker writes "by the same token." *Politics* 3.1281b15–19.
[xliv] The tape was changed at this point.

crucial point in the Aristotelian argument. Now he begins a new discussion of the same subject, in 3.1282b14.

Reader:
In all arts and sciences the end in view is some good. In the most sovereign of all the arts and sciences—and this is the art and science of politics—the end in view is the greatest good and the good which is most pursued. The good in the sphere of politics is justice; and justice consists in what tends to promote the common interest. General opinion makes it consist in some sort of equality. Up to a point this general opinion agrees with the philosophical inquiries which contain our conclusions on ethics. In other words, it holds that justice involves two factors—things, and the persons to whom things are assigned—and it considers that persons who are equal should have assigned to them equal things. But here there arises a question which must not be overlooked. Equals and unequals—yes; but equals and unequals *in what*? This is a question which raises difficulties, and involves us in philosophical speculation on politics.[xlv]

LS: I will not discuss this translation except to say that these two references to philosophy occur in the original, and that is very rare in such a book as the *Politics*. There is one point to be corrected, when he says "of all arts and sciences, the end is some good, and to the highest degree in the most authoritative of the sciences, but this is the political faculty," [this is] not as he translates it, [but] more literally, in Greek: *politikē dynamis*, "political power." That is a kind of joke Aristotle makes. "*Dynamis*" has this double meaning: that of power; but it can also mean the faculty of doing things political. Then it would be the political art or science. The joke consists in the fact that political power is here treated somewhat for a moment as an art or science, which makes us forget the harsh aspect of political power, you know, the more practical power. For the meaning of this, and also of the twofold reference to philosophy, the question of wisdom comes now to the fore.

Hitherto we have seen that what we ordinarily meet[xlvi] in the form of wisdom we can have in a properly constituted and balanced democracy. But there is another problem of wisdom which we have to face. Now what is that? How does this problem appear? The question concerns the various forms of excellences, as he makes clear. Now excellence is taken in this sense: that if some man excels, he excels over others, he is superior to them—the inequality of excellence, which sometimes when we use the word we do not remember. When we use the word "virtue," we do not think of the inequality it necessarily implies. Aristotle stresses this point here now. The implication is that the greatest of all excellences by virtue of which men can surpass one another is that of wisdom. But this is not yet developed. Aristotle makes first clear, starting from the political fact that while excellences are at the bottom of every political claim, not every excellence is of political relevance. Well, we all know that. Someone may be an excellent tightrope dancer, or a ballerina, or a dogcatcher, or a chess player: this is not an excellence in itself of any political relevance. But always there are excellences, superiorities involved. Now here we have the claims of these various excellences: wealth,

[xlv] *Politics* 3.1282b14–23.
[xlvi] It is possible that Strauss said "need" and that "meet" is a mistranscription.

wisdom, free birth, and so on. How do we settle the claim between these various claimants? And Aristotle takes here an example: If the things to be distributed were flutes, what would a sensible distributor do? Would he give the best flutes to the rich or the most handsome, or to the best flute players? And Aristotle says if he had a free hand, he would give them to the best flute players, i.e., the best knowers. The application is clear: if political office is to be distributed, it is possible they should be given to the best knowers, to the men who understand political things best. Now this leads to the consequence that one must accept the rule of a single outstandingly virtuous man, even if he is poor, because what has absence of money or wealth to do with ability to judge wisely? One could go a step further, though Aristotle only implies it here: If this is so, why not give the sovereign power to a man who is a conventional slave, if he is much wiser than all the master's class? If he is supremely wise, why should he not rule? This whole argument leads to the conclusion that the best regime would be the absolute rule of the absolutely superior man. Let us read that, 3.1284a4.

Reader:
If there is one person (or several persons, but yet not enough to form the full measure of a state) so pre-eminently superior in goodness that there can be no comparison between the goodness and political capacity which he shows (or several show, when there is more than one) and what is shown by the rest, such a person, or such persons, can no longer be treated as part of a city. Being so greatly superior to others in goodness and political capacity, they will suffer injustice if they are treated as worthy only of an equal share; for a person of this order may very well be like a god among men. This being the case, it is clear that law generally[xlvii] is necessarily limited to those who are equal in birth and capacity. There can be no law which runs against men who are utterly superior to others. They are a law in themselves. It would be a folly to attempt to legislate for them—[xlviii]

LS: Let us leave it[17] here. And that is the conclusion: if a man is of truly superior wisdom and virtue, surpassing all others in virtue and wisdom, then he cannot possibly be treated as an equal, because he is manifestly superior, i.e., unequal—and since wisdom and virtue are those qualifications which are as important for government as the art of flute-playing is for flute-playing, there is no way out but to give him this power. Now this leads to a longer discussion which we cannot follow here, a discussion of the democratic alternative to this treatment, and that is ostracism, which was as a legal institution in Athens: that an innocent citizen could be banished from the city merely because his mere existence or presence endangered the equality of others. He was a living challenge to the equality before all because of his manifest superiority. Aristotle says that this institution of ostracism has some political justice. "Political justice" means here justice with a view to the requirements of the city.

This, incidentally, is a passage which one should consider when studying Aristotle's teaching regarding natural justice or natural right in the fifth book of the *Ethics*, where he finds the paradoxical thesis that all right, natural or conventional, is changeable. This passage is usually not taken seriously. Here we see what Aristotle means by that: a man

[xlvii] Barker interpolates "[as well as any particular rule of equality in the distribution of office]."
[xlviii] *Politics* 3.1284a3–15.

who has done no wrong, who is superior to all others, is apparently punished, deprived of his right, because he in fact constitutes a danger to the democracy as established. So the strict rule—you must never punish or deprive of good things a just man—is here justly transgressed because of the overwhelming interests of the established regimes. This only in passing.

But Aristotle does not think this is defensible and understandable, that democracy strives to protect itself from such a "quote danger unquote," but the true solution would of course be to hand over the whole power in the city to this superior man. The man of outstanding virtue ought to be lifelong king, and that is the only solution. Now this is a very strange argument. We have first the most powerful argument ever made by Aristotle, to say nothing of Plato, in favor of democracy: a democracy, qualified in certain matters, satisfies all reasonable political demands. And then we suddenly are confronted with the most antidemocratic thing, namely, the rule of an absolute king, who has all powers, and we must understand what Aristotle means by that. In the later books, neither democracy as described in book 3 nor the kingship as[18] mentioned here is discussed. In other words, for the fundamental political considerations, the understanding of these two fundamental possibilities, that good democracy as sketched here and absolute monarchy, is absolutely essential from Aristotle's point of view.

Now after having gone so far, Aristotle goes over, without giving any reason, to a discussion of one kind of regime, namely, kingship. You know we must never forget the external *schēma*—kingship, aristocracy, democracy, and also polity, and so on—which is the framework of the Aristotelian discussion. Therefore, why should he not speak of kingship now? But it is clear: there is a direct connection with what preceded. The fundamental consideration led up to the problem of the absolutely superior individual, who as such would have to be king, and Aristotle then uses this opportunity to append to that a discussion of the various kinds of kingship, most of which are on a much lower level, of course. He distinguishes five different kinds of kingship, but only two require discussion, since the other three are only in between. And he discusses only the two extreme cases. The one is the absolute king, of whom we have heard before; the other is a king like the Spartan king, practically only a lifelong and hereditary general. And Aristotle says this question is of no fundamental interest, because the institution of lifelong generalship you can have under any regime, and for one reason or another, a democracy, oligarchy, or kingship can have lifelong generals. Again, a beautiful illustration of the principle that whatever is politically neutral, whatever can occur in every regime is as such politically uninteresting. A simple example from another scheme: if you live in a country which depends for mere survival on an irrigation system, and this is generally known and admitted, the irrigation system is not a political issue. It is very important; the whole country would be ruined if the irrigation system broke down, but it is unpolitical: a simple example of the fact that something can be very important and politically absolutely unimportant. And there is of course the opposite, which can *never* be: that something is politically important and otherwise unimportant. Or can you think of an example?

Student: In *Gulliver's Travels* [. . .] it is obviously very important to the whole question of regimes, but not in itself.

LS: Yes, but from which point of view? Only if you transcend the political sphere. In other words, for a philosopher it would be very unimportant, but for Lilliputians it would be very important. Yes, to that extent you are right. But since we are ordinary human beings, I believe we can say that whatever is politically important can never be simply unimportant. One would have to raise very high in order to be able to say what you just said.

Now in this section about kingship, which is the last part of book 3, Aristotle opens up again the question of the universal or absolute king and defends this institution against antiroyalists. The antiroyalists base their argument on rule of law rather than rule of men, an argument of which Aristotle had already disposed earlier. The laws themselves depend also on human beings who frame them and who enforce them. Now what is the meaning of this long discussion? After Aristotle has solved the problem of the best political regime, as far as it is possible to do so in a general discussion, in favor of a moderate acceptance of democracy, which is perfectly satisfactory, at least to us—that he takes up then such an extreme possibility, this absolute king, what is the reason for that? A stupid answer, but in a way a learned answer—because something can be both stupid and learned—is to say that Aristotle follows Plato, who had said in his *Laws* there are two models of regimes: democracy and monarchy.[xlix] Aristotle tries to do justice to this Platonic observation. But that only pushes the question back: why did Plato make this remark, and what does it mean for Plato? In the third book of the *Politics*, we recall, Aristotle started in the concrete discussion of an entirely different dualism, the dualism of democracy and oligarchy, which politically was obvious everywhere: rule of the rich, rule of the poor. And he decided, one can say, rather in favor of democracy than in favor of oligarchy. But now we have an entirely different polarity: not democracy or oligarchy, but democracy [or] absolute kingship. Now what is behind that? The question has to do with the problem of laws. Democracy, while it makes the democratic laws, necessarily acts through laws. In every regime where more than one man rules, there must be some legal order. I mean, you must have arrangements for how to reach decisions, and who should preside—a question which doesn't arise as such in a monarchy, where the king is the presiding officer as a matter of course, and all these formalities aren't as necessary in a kingship as they are in a democracy.

Now what is the point? I make this suggestion: that this absolute marvel of a king, surpassing everyone in wisdom and virtue, is the political reflection of the philosopher-king in Plato's sense. Aristotle does not speak of the philosopher-king, but it is the philosopher-king who is visible only in his kingly function. So the question of democracy and absolute kingship would be a reflection of the whole question regarding the relation of the city and philosophy. Democracies of course stand for the city, and the king stands for philosophy. The fact that there is such an issue has its root in a fundamental disproportion between philosophy and the city. For the time being, I remind you of what is implied by Aristotle's criticism of Hippodamus in the second book, namely, the

[xlix] *Laws*, book 3, 693d.

fundamental difference between the arts, intellectual arts, and the laws. There is a fundamental recalcitrance of the city to philosophy, which could be overcome, theoretically, if there were philosopher-kings. The reason for this disharmony is that the ends of the philosophers and of the nonphilosophers are radically different. Philosophy is concerned with understanding, with contemplation, we may call it; the nonphilosophers are not concerned with this, with whatever else they may be concerned. Now here we touch on the fundamental difference between modern and premodern philosophy and, in particular, political philosophy. We do not understand this side of classical political philosophy in Plato and Aristotle because we are sons or daughters of the modern age. In modern times, from the very beginning, the leading philosophers were of the opinion that philosophy itself will bring about, and not accidentally, a harmony between philosophy and the city. And how could this be, if the end of philosophy were the same as the end of the non-philosophers? Let us assume that the end of the nonphilosophers is something like terrestrial, earthly happiness—housing, health, clothing, and so on—and that philosophy or science (that means almost the same in earlier times) is there for the sake of making possible the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Then the end of philosophy and the end of the nonphilosophers would be identical: the gulf between them would be bridged. To this we add another consideration, linked to the first, and that is that owing to the view which emerged in the seventeenth century and then prevailed, philosophy or science necessarily brings about enlightenment of the nonphilosophers or scientists and therefore revolutionizes the opinion of the citizen body, public opinion, political opinion, and therewith revolutionizes political society. Therefore there is no problem regarding its influence, the positive influence of philosophy on society, regarding the harmony between philosophy and society.

This I link with what I said earlier: the new kind of regimes, which Aristotle did not consider, like liberal democracy, communism, and fascism, these new kinds of regimes must be traced to their theoretical principle, which is not necessarily visible at the first glance; not very recondite, but still it needs some analysis. And then I think you will come back—surely in the case of liberal democracy and communism; in the case of Russia it is a bit more complicated—you will come back to the fact that in these modern doctrines, the enlightenment of the citizen body—and "enlightenment" means here not merely enlightenment about their rights and duties but a general kind of enlightenment: enlightenment as the spreading of *scientific* information, of scientific understanding—is the condition for the establishment of the best order of society.

I can illustrate it by one extreme example, but it has a great merit (extreme examples can be very helpful when they show the simple lines very clearly), and that is Thomas Hobbes, who plays a crucial role for modern political thought. Hobbes built his whole doctrine on the view that there is one and only one natural right, fundamental right: self-preservation, based on the inescapable character of the fear of death, in particular of violent death. And this he built up. There are many difficulties, some very striking; for example, that in Hobbes's time there were many examples of people who were not afraid of violent death at all and, especially in the religious wars, people who were prepared to die for what they regarded as a true faith. Now Hobbes has to face this question, because if these people are right, Hobbes is entirely wrong: you cannot build a political doctrine

on the fear of violent death. Hobbes called religion "fear of powers invisible," and he raises the question: Which is the greater fear, that of violent death or that of powers invisible? And then he says: While the power of the powers invisible is greater than that of the powers visible, speaking from the point of view of religion, the *fear* of death is stronger than the fear of powers invisible. But this seems to be absurd. What is behind Hobbes's argument, which is in a sense self-contradictory, is this. By nature, according to truth and nature, the fear of violent death is the greatest force, the rock-bottom of society. This is endangered by the fear of powers invisible, therefore the rational and natural order will not work if the fear of powers invisible is not taken away—in other words, if the people are not enlightened.

Hobbes's political schema is the first which exists which requires for its working, on any level, popular enlightenment. Hobbes even speaks of popular enlightenment. He says somewhere, "gradually the vulgar become educated"—*Paulatim eruditur vulgus*.[l] Now what in Hobbes is only discernible if you follow strictly the theoretical argument became quite visible in the eighteenth century, in the age of enlightenment *par excellence*. Here we find more and more doctrines which demand for their political efficacy popular enlightenment. There is nothing of this kind in Plato and Aristotle. That a certain degree of theoretical understanding is necessary for the rulers in an aristocratic regime, that was of course admitted, and there is a discussion of that in the first book of Cicero's *Republic*. But not this notion; the notion of enlightenment is a peculiarly modern notion and it gives modern politics its peculiar character. The propaganda of which we hear so much, Marx's propaganda, is primarily meant to be, of course, enlightenment about the true character of the social forces. That this has long been abandoned, especially since Stalin's time, is another matter.

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[1] Deleted "but."
[2] Deleted "the."
[3] Deleted "Now."
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[7] Deleted "Still in one respect.
[8] Deleted "to bring."
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[13] Deleted "Is this."
[14] Deleted "may."
[15] Deleted "they."
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[l] Hobbes, *De Homine*, 14, 13.

Session 14: March 18, 1965

Aristotle, *Politics*, books 7 and 4

Leo Strauss: I remind you again of the main topic of Aristotle's *Politics*, the regime, which means the variety of regimes. In order to study them properly, we are in need of a comprehensive view of all possible regimes. Aristotle provides us with such a schema in his enumeration of the six regimes which I outlined some time ago.[i] You remember these: from the point of view of number, and from the point of view of goodness and badness. There is a complete enumeration, nothing is left out. But there is this disjunction: these are merely numerical or formal distinctions, which is good enough for guaranteeing comprehensiveness but not good enough for understanding certain things. We must replace "the few and the many," if we want to understand the political things, by "the rich and the poor," and hence by the two regimes in which either the rich or the poor prevail, oligarchy or democracy. This leads naturally to the consideration, since both oligarchy and democracy are defective, of whether there is not a mean between them which has the advantages of each, while avoiding the disadvantages. These are, on the lower level, the polity, and on the higher level, aristocracy. Oligarchy, democracy, polity, and aristocracy.[ii] In the comprehensive scheme we have six. Which are missing?

Student: Monarchy and tyranny.

LS: Yes, and what do they have in common?

Student: There's only one person who chairs the government.

LS: Who rules. So in other words, these four regimes have this in common, that they are all republican regimes. Tyranny can be simply disregarded, and as for kingship, it is no longer possible according to Aristotle once cities have reached a certain size or maturity.

Now the beginning of the political, *practical* inquiry is from democracy and oligarchy, just as we today would begin with democracy and communism, whatever phenomena we might take in later—Franco's Spain or Salazar's Portugal—but they are not in the foreground, the way in which democracy and communism are in the foreground. Now the difficulty which Aristotle confronts is this: both democracy and oligarchy are bad, for different reasons. One can state a common reason: the principle of neither democracy [n]or oligarchy is virtue. The good regimes are those in which the virtuous and the wise, and only the virtuous and the wise, rule. The first reaction of such hardheaded people as we are, is: Fairy tales. And this is, I'm sure, the reaction of the large majority of the

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[i] See session 12.

[ii] The sixfold schema according to number of rulers and whether they rule for the common good or their own advantage: monarchy (1), aristocracy (few), polity (many) for the common good; democracy (many), oligarchy (few), tyranny (1) for the rulers' advantage. Strauss includes all the options in principle and underlines all later reclassifications.

professions. Nevertheless, we hear political men even today speak of the pursuit of excellence. And "excellence," one can say, is a translation of "virtue." Or of "high culture." People are concerned with culture on all levels but I believe, if confronted with a choice between low and high culture, they would not dare to come out for low culture in preference to the high. Far from being extraneous to the city, excellence is its highest end. The greatest error which any student of political science can make is to forget or to minimize this end, the need for which will assert itself in unexpected quarters. To understand this fact properly, we must remember something which is easily forgotten: that the highest is not necessarily the most urgent. I mean, the fantastic people—the so-called idealists, or however they call them, the missionaries—they forget that the highest is not necessarily the most urgent. Aristotle never forgets this. The simplest example from everyday life: appendectomy may be the most urgent thing for a man, but it can never be the highest for him. The pragmatic proof is when you meet a man who has undergone an appendectomy, you never admire him for it. [Laughter] You may envy him that he survived it, but you do not admire him. The highest end of the city is not its sole end.

In other words, as Aristotle puts it, the city comes into being for the sake of life, but it exists for the sake of the good life. And this primary end, the mere life, of course subsists all the time. Every man is always concerned with his sheer self-preservation, apart from any concern with reform, with improvement, or whatever else. Since the highest end of the city is not its sole end, the claims of those men who are not virtuous or wise must always be considered. After all, they too want to live, although they are unwilling and unable to live virtuously. In other words, if we consider only the highest end of the city, we arrive at the conclusion that the only legitimate claim to rule is that of the virtuous and wise, ruling in their own right, not by virtue of delegation or election. That is an absurdity from Aristotle's point of view, that the virtuous and wise should rule by delegation: How can the lower give the title to the higher?

Yet this view, that the only legitimate rule is aristocracy in this sense, suffers from an obvious flaw because it abstracts from something of the utmost importance, and we all know today what it is from which this view mistakenly abstracts. It is now called power—a very loose word; we mean here of course *political* power. But this means primarily brachial power, the power of muscle, from which such beautiful expressions as "muscling in" are derived. This can never be forgotten. But not under all conditions is mere brachial power sufficient. In the case of very simple armaments, it is so; but if the armaments become more complex—think of armored knights versus very strong blacksmiths—then the armored knights are likely to best the blacksmiths. There came a well-known equalizer in the nineteenth century which made possible the equal status of all fighters, as everyone could learn to handle rifles. Today, as we all know, the situation has again radically changed. But it still comes down to this: the power to kill.[1] [Hence] the emphasis in Hobbes on violent death. This is therefore an important consideration. I would like to read to you a passage from Plato's *Laws*, from the third book, which might be helpful here.

[Athenian Stranger]: What and how many are the agreed claims in the matter of ruling and being ruled, alike in cities, large and small, and in households? Is not the right of father and mother one of them? And in general, would not the claim of parents to rule over offspring be a claim universally correct?
[Clinias]: Certainly.
[Ath. Stranger]: And next to this, the right of the ignoble to rule over the noble? And then, following on these as a third claim, the right of older people to rule and of younger to be ruled?
[Clinias]: Sure.
[Ath. Stranger]: The fourth right is that slaves ought to be ruled and masters ought to rule.
[Clinias]: Undoubtedly.
[Ath. Stranger]: And the fifth is, I imagine, that the stronger should rule and the weaker be ruled. [In the four preceding ones, strength as strength did not enter—LS]
[Clinias]: A truly compulsory form of rule.
[Ath. Stranger]: Yes, and one that is very prevalent in all kinds of arguments, being according to nature, as Pindar of Thebes once said. The most important claim, it would seem, is the sixth, which ordains that the man without understanding should follow, and the wise man rule. Nevertheless, my most wise Pindar, this is a thing that I for one would hardly assert to be against nature, but rather according to nature, the natural rule of law without coercion over willing subjects. The link being that law, as a product of human wisdom, is ruling wisdom.
[Clinias]: You speak with perfect correctness.
[Ath. Stranger]: To be loved by the gods, and to have good luck, marks the seventh form of rule, where we bring a man forward for casting of lots, and declare that if he gains the lot, he will most justly be the ruler, but if he fails, he shall take his place among the ruled.[iii]

This is a seemingly disorderly enumeration of seven claims to rule, which all have to be considered and are considered by Plato in the *Laws*, but the one to which I particularly wish to draw your attention is that sheer strength, brachial power, is a political consideration. And since the virtuous and wise are not necessarily bodily stronger than the vicious and unwise, there is a fundamental difficulty regarding aristocracy. It is then necessary to pay careful attention to what we will call the submoral claims, the claims not based on virtue but, say, on mere strength. Or on mere old age, because not in all cases are the older the wiser. Strange as it may sound, sometimes the son may be wiser than his father. But political science would be incomplete if it did not also consider the supramoral, not only the submoral, namely, philosophy or the theoretical understanding: the possibility, namely, that society receive a decisive direction from the intellectual, spiritual claim beyond the merely moral claim. You all have heard of Plato's philosopher-king, and we have discussed in this class Comte's proposal regarding the spiritual government of men of science, and there are quite a few other proposals which one may meet in between.[iv] Aristotle does not explicitly discuss this very interesting problem, the suprapolitical. He leaves it at a discussion of the political and the subpolitical. The reason for this is that in his view, the sphere of morality and of the *polis*

[iii] *Laws*, book 3, 690a–d. Presumably Strauss's translation.
[iv] Session 1.

is closed: you can find your bearings there without particular attention to what transcends the *polis*. Nevertheless, Aristotle refers to this problem because he is a comprehensive thinker—implicitly or, rather, allusively. Now let us first turn to the end of book 3, the very end.

Reader:
After these things have been determined,[v] we must next attempt to treat of the best form of constitution, asking ourselves, 'Under what conditions does it tend to arise, and how can it be established?' In order to make a proper inquiry into this subject, it is necessary—[vi]

LS: And read the note of Barker: "It is necessary." What does Barker say here?

Reader:
The words at the close of this chapter are repeated at the beginning of book 7.[vii]

LS: Yes. In other words, book 3 is obviously followed by book 4, but there is an indication in the last sentence of book 3 that the continuation is in books 7 and 8. That is one of the most obvious textual difficulties in Aristotle's *Politics*. What he means, I believe, is this. We can go on from this broad consideration of regimes, which moves ultimately between the poles of absolute kingship and democracy; one can go on from there to books 4 to 6, which do not deal with the best regime. Or one can go on to books 7 and 8, which contain a detailed discussion of the best regime. Both are possible, but the reasoning is this: one cannot see the more or less imperfect regimes discussed in the central books without awareness of the best. May I ask why one cannot do that, say, in the ordinary democracy or oligarchy, why one cannot study that without awareness of the best?

Student: One can only see the story, in his *Metaphysics*, after knowing the truth by nature.

LS: That is very sophisticated. In the simple language which every commonsensical man or woman can understand?

Student: We have to know the good form to know what is perverted or not good.

LS: Yes. And therefore it is important to see a bad or more or less imperfect regime as what it is, if you do not know what the best is. Its imperfection is as much a part of its being as its sensible qualities, red, blue, and so on. But on the other hand, one cannot spell out the institutions, the detailed institutions, of the best regimes without learning something from the actual institutions of the imperfect regimes. This I believe is the simple solution to this textual difficulty.

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[v] "These issues determined," is the exact wording in Barker.
[vi] *Politics* 3.1288b2–6.
[vii] "The words at the close of this chapter, which ends in this abrupt manner, are repeated exactly at the beginning of Book VII." Barker, 152 n.

Now let us then turn first to books 7 and 8, in which Aristotle discusses the best regime. The best regime requires that we know which way of life is choiceworthy, the most choiceworthy. In order to answer that, we must know what the principles of choice are, what the things are we esteem and desire, the good things. There are three of them: external goods; those in the body—health, strength, and beauty; and those in the soul. Those in the body belong to us, obviously—they cannot be taken away from us as property or even reputation can be taken away from us. Happiness requires that we have all three kinds, therefore there is no question regarding the end of human life. In other words, Aristotle does not believe there is a cause for what is now called relativism. Let us now read 1323a27. That is, "All these things must belong to the happy or blessed. For no one would call someone blessed"—

Reader:
No one would call a man happy who had no particle of fortitude, temperance, justice, or wisdom i.e., none of the goods of the soul: [viii] who feared the flies buzzing about his head; who abstained from none of the extremest forms of extravagance whenever he felt hungry or thirsty; who would ruin his dearest friends for the sake of a farthing; whose mind was as senseless, and as much astray, as that of a child or a madman. These are all propositions which would be accepted by nearly everyone as soon as they were stated. But differences begin to arise when we ask, "How much of each good should men have? And what is the relative superiority of one good over another?" Any modicum of goodness[ix] is regarded as adequate; but wealth and property, power, reputation, and all such things, are coveted to an excess which knows no bounds or limits. There is an answer which can be given to men who act in this way. "The facts themselves make it easy for you to assure yourselves on these issues. You can see for yourselves that the goods of the soul are not gained or maintained by the external goods. It is the other way around. You can see for yourselves that felicity—no matter whether men find it in pleasure, or goodness, or both of the two—belongs more to those who have cultivated their character and mind to the uttermost, and kept acquisition of external goods within moderate limits, than it does to those who have managed to acquire more external goods than they can possibly use, and are lacking in the goods of the soul."[x]

LS: This is Aristotle's simple argument: there can be no doubt about that, that the goods of the soul are higher than those of the body, and those of the body higher than these other things, the external goods. But all three are needed. And the question concerns only that regarding which there may very well be controversy: How *much* of each in a given situation? There is no general answer possible to this question.

Now what do we say about Aristotle's argument? Let us assume that we could have the privilege of having Mr. Giancana in our midst. I suppose you know who he is, he is reputed to be a leader of the crime syndicate in this city.[xi] What would he say? Assuming

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[viii] Barker interpolates "[i.e. none of the goods of the soul]."
[ix] The reader omits the interpolation "[i.e. of the 'goods of the soul']."
[x] *Politics* 7.1323a27–b6.
[xi] Sam Giancana was allegedly a crime boss in Chicago in the fifties and sixties.

we could really bring him down to a theoretical discussion, which I would not take for granted. He might possibly agree with everything, for very obvious reasons: in order to present himself as a nice man, just as he would do some other things for that reason. But what would he say? Would he not admit that a man who is afraid of every fly or every insect is a miserable man? Because this man would of course be afraid of everything; he would live in constant misery for reasons of fear. Now what about a man who is very foolish, in the simple sense of the term, that he always makes the wrong choices? I believe again that Giancana would say this is also not a happy man, because how can he stay out of jail if he is so stupid? [Laughter] I cannot develop this point fully, but I will draw your attention to it. In the extreme attacks on ordinary morality you find, say, in Plato's *Gorgias*, in Callicles's famous attack—courage, manliness on the one hand, and prudence, cleverness on the other,[2] are admitted to be virtues. They are not controversial. The difficulty would concern the two others in the Platonic scheme, moderation and justice. That leads therefore to a long discussion.[xii] But Aristotle makes clear at the beginning of this whole work—for the *Politics* is only the second part of the work, the first part being the *Nicomachean Ethics*—that he is addressing only well-bred men, only gentlemen. They of course will not raise gangster-like objections, but it becomes necessary for us also, no doubt, to consider the phenomenon of the gangster—and then we will have to turn to Plato, who has some arguments or people defending gangsterism, and we must see how we can overcome that.

Now the next point that Aristotle makes, which is crucial, is that the happiness of the individual and the happiness of the city are the same. So if someone believes that the happiness of man consists in being rich, then he will also say that the happiness of the city consists in being rich. From that it follows, of course, that the best regime would be directed above all to the goods of the soul, to the virtues of the mind, although it also leads to bodily goods and external goods. So this is a very strange assertion for us—I will come back to that later—that the end of the city and the end of the individual are identical. Now Aristotle turns first to another controversy. There are two kinds of virtues: the moral virtues, the virtues of character which are practiced in action, in society; and on the other hand, the virtues of the mind which can be practiced in solitude. Now it is controversial which of these two kinds of virtues is the highest—in other words, whether practical or political life is preferred or rather the contemplative life, that of the philosopher. Now since the end of the city is the same as the end of the individual, this controversy concerns of course the city as well. But how does this alternative look in the case of the city? What is the difficulty for you, Mr. Levy?

Mr. Levy: The city doesn't think, Mr. Strauss.

LS: Pardon?

Mr. Levy: The city doesn't think.

LS: Well, that could be perhaps too harsh. The city thinks, of course, in and through its government. But . . . it doesn't philosophize.

[xii] For Callicles's views in the *Gorgias*, see especially 483a–c, 490a with 491a–d, 491e–492c.

Now how does the alternative look in the case of the city? We can say, following Aristotle's explanation, practical life means going outward. Extroverted. And this means in the case of the city trying to rule over neighboring cities: expansionism, imperialism. The theoretical argument, on the other hand, is not going outward: theoretical men are introverted. And therefore the political counterpart, the political reflection of that, would be the rejection of imperialism. Aristotle rejects imperialism altogether. The end is peace and not war; in connection with that, not expansion. He admits that happiness consists in action, and to that extent the practical men seem to be wiser than the theoretical men. But 1325bl6:

Reader:
If we are right in our view, and felicity should be held to consist in "well-*doing*," it follows that the life of action is best, alike for every state as a whole and for each individual in his own conduct. But the life of action need not be, as is sometimes thought, a life which involves relations to others. Nor should our thoughts be held to be active only when they are directed to objects which have to be achieved by action. Thoughts with no object beyond themselves, and speculations and trains of reflection followed purely for their own sake, are far more deserving of the name of active.[xiii] Action of some sort or other is therefore our end and aim; but, even in the sphere of outward acts, action can also be predicated—and that in the fullest measure and the true sense of the word—of those who, by their thoughts, are the prime authors of such acts.[xiv] States situated by themselves, and resolved to live in isolation—

LS: Who cannot have any action on other states; say, on an island, without any connection with another island or mainland—

Reader:
need not be therefore inactive. They can achieve activity by sections: the different sections of such a state will have many mutual connections.[xv] This is also, and equally, true of the individual human being. If it were not so, there would be something wrong with God himself, and the whole of the universe, who have no activities other than those of their own internal life.

It is therefore clear that the same way of life which is best for the individual must also be best for the state as a whole and for all its members.[xvi]

LS: It is perhaps not quite so clear for every reason. Now what Aristotle says is: action, yes, because it is understood in contradistinction to laziness, to inactivity. But action may remain entirely intrinsic, as in the case of thinking or contemplation, of such thinking as does not concern itself with external goals. [The] thinking of the carpenter is not of

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[xiii] The reader omits the words "'Well-doing' is the end we seek."
[xiv] The reader omits the interpolation "[As thought in itself may be activity, so activity may exist without relation to others.]"
[xv] From here Barker interpolates "[and the whole will thus be active, in its own internal life.]"
[xvi] *Politics* 7.1325b14–32.

course simply intrinsic, because it issues in fabrication, and similarly the action of the statesman. God is essentially active: this Aristotle simply takes over from accepted views. And this activity is according to Aristotle thinking of thinking: thinking thinking itself. No relation to externals. The Aristotelian god is not the biblical God. Here he asserts again the supremacy of the theoretical life, even in regard to the city, but what does it mean in the case of the city? This we have still to understand. Not more than the rejection of expansionist or imperialist policy as such. We draw this conclusion: the city is not capable of theoretical life proper, only an *analogon* of it. And this *analogon* is the city which[3] is entirely concerned with the motions within itself in its own improvement. The end of life of the city is therefore not strictly speaking identical with that of the individual, contrary to Aristotle's explicit assertion. It may be true that a city within which philosophers can live is better than a city within which philosophers cannot live. That may be so, although this is not quite clear, and the proof that it is not quite clear is this. Aristotle, like Plato, preferred the Spartan regime to the Athenian regime. But under the Spartan regime, philosophers were impossible. In the Athenian regime they were possible, although with the danger of ending as Socrates ended. But Socrates lived for seventy years in Athens. The key point is this: however important philosophy may be for Aristotle—and it is of course the most important thing—philosophy or the philosophers are not an essential part of the city. This comes out very beautifully, I think, in the medieval Aristotelian, Marsilius of Padua,[xvii] who states Aristotle's doctrine as follows. One of the parts of the city is the teachers, something which Aristotle never says, but the teachers are the priests, i.e., not the philosophers. So while it deviates from the letter of Aristotle, something is still in the spirit of Aristotle: philosophy transcends the city.

Now we will come back to this key question again. Aristotle turns then to starting from scratch, trying to build up a good city with a good regime, and he starts like any other craftsman would, from the material, the matter. Now one of the important considerations regarding the material which the founder of a regime must have is numbers: how many inhabitants, how many citizens. He looks for the optimum number, and the answer he gives (we cannot read everything, so I will mention only the main points) is: not more than mutual trust requires. And mutual trust requires mutual knowledge. In other words, differently stated: a city must not be so large that there is not possible mutual supervision. Perhaps by maiden aunts—it doesn't matter who exercises it in particular. But these big Babylons, where everyone can do as he lists, that is not soil for a good regime. Incidentally, this question of size, which became a matter of ridicule in modern times—for example, in Hobbes, who simply says the question of size is irrelevant—that depends on the situation in foreign policy and other accidents, there is not any meaning in questioning it. But with these big *metropoleis* and other phenomena in the mid-twentieth century, it is again shown that the question of an optimal size is a necessary question, naturally, not for the country as a whole so much as for the individual towns.

Now as for the internal structure of the best regime, the principle of it is this: not every kind of human being that is indispensable for the city can be a part of the city. For those who cannot participate in the end of the city but are only means for the city are not properly parts. Needless to say, the parts proper, let us say the government, are also

[xvii] Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor pacis* (The Defender of Peace) (1324).

indispensable, but there is a difference between ingredients of the city which are only indispensable and those which are truly parts. What then are the indispensable works or functions of the city, without which there could not be a city? 1328b4.

Reader:
It remains for us now to enumerate *all* the necessary elements of the city. Our list of these elements will include what we have called the "parts" of the city, as well as what we have termed its "conditions."[xviii]

LS: "Conditions" are what I have termed "indispensable."

Reader:
To make such a list, we must first determine how many services a city performs; and then we shall easily see how many elements it must contain. The first thing to be provided is food. The next is arts and crafts; for life is a business which needs many tools. The third is arms: the members of a state must bear arms in person, partly in order to maintain authority and repress disobedience, and partly in order to meet any threat of external aggression. The fourth thing which has to be provided is a certain supply of property, alike for domestic use and for military purposes. The fifth (but, in order of merit, the first)—

LS: That is, "the fifth and the first."

Reader:
is an establishment for the service of the gods, or, as it is called, public worship. The sixth thing, and the most vitally necessary, is a method of deciding what is demanded by the public interest and what is just in men's private dealings.[xix] These are the services which every city may be said to need.

LS: "Services" is also not appropriate, but rather "the works, the functions, the deeds." A service—that has certain un-Aristotelian connotations.

Reader:
The city is not a mere casual group. It is a group which, as we have said, must be self-sufficient for the purposes of life; and if any of these services is missing it cannot be totally self-sufficient. A city should accordingly be so constituted as to be competent for all these services. It must therefore contain a body of farmers to produce all the necessary food; craftsmen; a military force; a propertied class; priests; and a body for deciding necessary issues and determining what is the public interest.[xx]

[xviii] Barker's translation contains minor differences: "It remains for us now to enumerate all the elements necessary for the existence of the state. Our list of these elements will include what we have called the 'parts' of the state as well as what we have termed its 'conditions.'"
[xix] The reader omits the interpolation "[i.e. some system of deliberation and jurisdiction]."
[xx] *Politics* 7.1328b2–23.

LS: Literally, "judges of what is necessary and beneficial." This latter implies both deliberative–legislative and judicial. Now you see here in the enumeration Aristotle starts from bottom to top. What they need most urgently of course is food, and he goes up from that to the highest. This implies that government proper, the deliberative and judicial, is higher than the priesthood or the concern with the divine things. Yet in one sense the concern with the divine things is the highest, as is indicated by this strange expression, "the fifth and the first." From one point of view the fifth, from another the first. And the reason for the ambiguity is this: that from Aristotle's point of view the true concern with the divine things is philosophy. The reflection of this true concern is religion, as we say. There is no Greek word for religion, although it offers itself almost inevitably. The word which the Greeks would use more naturally would be "piety," *eusebeia*. It is very interesting that *eusebeia*, piety, is not mentioned among the virtues in Aristotle's *Ethics*. Now let us go on from where we left off.

Reader:
These points determined, a further point is still left for consideration. Should all the members share in the performance of all these services? (That is a possibility: the same persons may all be engaged simultaneously in farming, the practice of arts and crafts, and the work of deliberation and jurisdiction.)

LS: Is this not clear? That while the city needs these various functions, they do not all have to be distributed in different classes. Peasants could be warriors, and could be the majority in the assembly—why not?

Reader:
Or should we assume a separate body of persons for each of the separate services? Or, again, should some of the services be assigned to different sets of persons, and others be shared by all? The same system need not be followed in every regime. Different systems, as we have noted, are possible: all may share in all functions, or different persons may undertake different functions. The existence of these alternatives explains why constitutions differ: in democracies all men share in all functions, while the opposite practice is followed in oligarchies.

LS: This must be reasonably understood. Aristotle does not say that in democracies everyone is both a farmer and an artisan, but he means politically interesting functions, the deliberative and judicial.

Reader:
Here we are only concerned with the best or ideal regime.[xxi]

LS: "Ideal" is also not a Greek word. It was coined in the seventeenth century; it didn't exist before that. If you wanted, you could say "the regime according to wish or prayer," meaning of course according to wish or prayer of sensible men. Now how this came to be called *ideal*, with a word derivative from Plato's "*idea*," is a very long question. I will only say one point to show you the difficulty: that Plato's regime in the *Republic* is not a

[xxi] Here again the reader has replaced Barker's "constitution" with "regime."

Platonic idea, it is something made by men. The blueprint is made by men. The man-made blueprint is not an idea proper. What an idea might mean I cannot now discuss. Go on.

Reader:
Now the best regime is that under which the city can attain the greatest felicity; and that, as we have already stated, cannot exist without goodness. Upon these principles it clearly follows that a state with an ideal regime—a state which has for its members men who are absolutely just and not men who are merely just in relation to some particular standard—cannot have its citizens living the life of mechanics or shopkeepers, which is ignoble and inimical to goodness.

LS: "Goodness" is here *virtue*.

Reader:
Nor can it have them engaged in farming: leisure is a necessity, both for growth in virtue and for the pursuit of political activities.[xxii]

LS: What does he mean by this distinction between justice absolutely understood and justice with a view to hypothesis (to an assumption)? Well, there is a democratic concept of justice, there is an oligarchic concept of justice. These are concepts with regard to an assumption, an assumption which grows up naturally but which on reflection proves to be unsound. Justice simply is that notion of justice which stands the test of examination. So Aristotle makes it quite clear: he excludes farmers and artisans and small traders from citizenship because they lack the leisure and dignity required for life devoted to virtue. In other words, Aristotle's final decision is not democratic. But there are functions which remain: fighting, wealth, priesthood, and government. They must belong to the same men, but in a way different groups, with a view to the natural distinctions of youth, maturity, and old age. That is to say, in their youth, they are fighters; in their maturity, they are governors; in their old age, they are priests.

The question we must address to Aristotle after what we have learned from him is: How can you make such a tremendous step, throw out the *dēmos* altogether, after what you told us about the necessity of considering the claims of the *dēmos*? Is this not very strange? How would Aristotle reply to us? Very simple: You only have to read, and while reading, try to think. The best regime is a city without a *dēmos*. There may be slaves around; there must be slaves around, resident aliens, at any rate, unnaturalized citizens. Farming and the crafts are to be exercised by slaves and metics. There is a provision, as Aristotle points out, for the emancipation of slaves, so that if they are not satisfied with their miserable lot, a reward is held out to them and to all slaves, as Aristotle says. Naturally he means it, that if they behave well for a sufficiently long time, they will be emancipated. Clearly this is a great difficulty, because if they can be emancipated, they can take care of themselves: their enslavement was not natural, it was unjust in the first place. This is a major difficulty of Aristotle's construction. Of course one could say: When you take a general picture of the Republic of Venice as it developed, you find

[xxii] *Politics* 7.1328b24–1329a2.

traces of what Aristotle says here very clearly. But there we see, as in other Italian cities, a gradual formation of a plebs. Naturally there are emancipated slaves, and these resident aliens who don't remember anymore whether they came from Sicily or Asia Minor but are as true-born in this particular place as any full-blooded citizen, and what have you then? They are not legally a plebs. They are not recognized to be citizens, but they are human beings and they will be dissatisfied and take action, as human nature is apt to do.

Now what is the consequence? Aristotle knows that, of course. Under these conditions, after some generations, even after some centuries, a *dēmos* has formed itself in that best city. Well, the answer is I think obvious. Either the city makes the necessary adaptation, it ceases to be an aristocracy and becomes a mixture of aristocracy and democracy or, failing that, it will perish, necessarily. This is for Aristotle not such a threat as it would seem to us, because he is permeated by the certainty that every thing which has come into being will perish again—including Karl Marx's "realm of freedom" with all its beauties, which, as we know from the mouth of Engels if not from the mouth of Marx, will perish again. As long as it lasts, the best regime is the best. And we would say: Well, in our own lives as individuals, we also know that we must die, and it does make a difference whether we have lived well or ill while we could. So Aristotle's best regime embodies, then, the simple rejection of democracy—just as of oligarchs, of course—these are not rich people, of course, they are well-to-do, but that is not their main claim: their main claim is virtue, that they are virtuous. That is to say, he rejects that simple schema, democracy [versus] oligarchy, the practical schema based on the actualities of his age, from which he started. Yet the consideration of the superior claim of virtue leads to aristocracy, as we have seen, and eventually to absolute kingship, in the case of a man of outstanding virtue. What happens to absolute kingship at the end of Aristotle's discussion of the best regime? Let us read that: 1332b15.

Reader:
As all political associations are composed of governors and governed, we have to consider whether the two should be distinguished for life, or merged together in a single body. The system of education will necessarily vary according to the answer we give. We may imagine one set of circumstances in which it would be obviously better that a lasting distinction should once and for all be established between governors and governed. This would be if there were one class in the state surpassing all others as much as gods and heroes are supposed to surpass mankind—a class of men so outstanding, physically as well as mentally, that the superiority of the ruling stock was indisputably clear to their subjects. But that is a difficult assumption to make; and we have nothing in actual life like the gulf between kings and subjects which the writer Scylax describes as existing in India. We may therefore draw the conclusion, which can be defended on many grounds, that all should share alike in a system of government under which they rule and are ruled by turns. In a society of peers equality means that all should have the same rights: and a constitution can hardly survive if it is founded on injustice.[xxiii] The subject citizens will then be joined by all[xxiv] of the country-side in a common policy of revolution; and the

[xxiii] The reader omits the interpolation "[i.e. if it gives different rights to men who are of the same quality]."
[xxiv] Barker interpolates "[the serfs]."

civic body will be too small to cope successfully with all its enemies. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that there should be a difference between governors and governed. How they can differ, and yet share alike, is a dilemma which legislators have to solve. We have already touched on a possible solution in a previous chapter. Nature, we have suggested, has provided us with the distinction we need. She has divided a body of citizens who are all generically the same into two different age-groups, a younger and an older, one of them meant to be governed and the other to act as the government. Youth never resents being governed, or thinks itself better than its governors; and it is all the less likely to do so if it knows that it will take over the government on reaching a proper maturity.[xxv]

LS: Is this a solution to the great difficulty? Absolute kingship and regimes of this kind are possible only if the rulers are manifestly, to everybody, superior to the ruled. No one [among them] ever has glasses[4] or needs any other artificial touches, and they lead a perfectly clean and unimpeachable life, privately and publicly, and they are of superior wisdom. When they decide on a war, one doesn't question whether the war is necessary, for example, but only whether it can be won. But Aristotle says that won't happen. Such a manifest superiority doesn't exist. Even if a man is superior in wisdom and virtue, this superiority is clear only to people who understand something of virtue. And so, for example, no one would say that Winston Churchill, at least when he became older, was a man of outstanding beauty, so that when he appeared all teenagers were thrilled in addition to the members of the House of Lords. In other words, that doesn't exist. And therefore this is a final judgment of absolute kingship, which he had discussed provisionally in book 3. The utmost we can dare to hope is the rule of equals. Now this means, of course, a special type of men, as we have seen: the exclusion of the lower classes. There is no *dēmos* in this particular society.[5]

Here the question arises: We need a distinction between rulers and ruled, obviously, because not all can rule, and how can it be done fairly? Aristotle says very simply: It is that the ruled, generally speaking, are the young. No one can have access to a ruling office before he is thirty. This is what Aristotle says is the best we can do, and he makes clear later on in the sequel that the absolute kingship of which he spoke in such glowing terms is possible only at the beginning of civil life. The founder[s]—[6] men like Romulus in Rome, Theseus in Athens, and in a way Lycurgus in Sparta—they were men of outstanding, surpassing virtue and no one begrudged them their power. And we find a repetition of that in new, emergent states, where there is a tendency also to find one man, rather than more, as the father. I don't believe we should bring in psychoanalysis, but ["father"] in the old sense: father of the fathers, the founder.

Now of the utmost importance to the legislator according to Aristotle is not the externals, external conditions—although they are very important, and we must discuss that at great length—but the core of his concern is education, the education of the young. The first point which he makes, which is known in a way today in this country but was perhaps not known in traditional political teaching: education must be relative to the regime. In other words, if democratic, it must be suited to that; if in an oligarchy, oligarchic; and

[xxv] *Politics* 7.1332b12–41.

aristocratic in an aristocracy. This[7] political character of education implies that education must be public. He discusses at great length how babies should be brought up. He goes very far in that, and even prenatal care is carefully considered by Aristotle—even more the good age for spouses. One of the most amazing things in Aristotle, not unamusing, is that he tries to figure out the optimum age of the husband and wife with a view to some end of their generative power,[xxvi] so that if they should reach that end simultaneously, they must marry when the husband is thirty-seven and the wife is eighteen. [Laughter] Whether they like that—well, that is a political doctrine and they are not asked. The arbitrary wills of individuals do not originate that. He really figures it out very neatly.

Now we come back to the most important question, that of education. It must be public. In an aristocracy—and of course Aristotle is here concerned with an aristocracy—education will be liberal. Today "liberal" is used almost synonymously with "democratic," not to say "extreme democratic." This is understandable today, but it cannot be viewed so with Aristotle. "Liberal" means free from all the slavishness to which our flesh is heir. Education would be education in the liberal arts: Aristotle mentions reading, writing, gymnastics, music, and drawing. Now he knows that some of them, like reading and writing, are also good for utilitarian purposes—business and your transactions with your neighbors—but this is not the key point. The key point is that we begin to think in worthwhile and not in monetary terms. Education must train the young for both business and leisure, but the end is leisure, not business. Now here is a point which has frequently been forgotten in modern times. Aristotle makes a distinction between leisure and relaxation. Relaxation is of course for the sake of business. We relax in order to be at our job tomorrow morning, and hence relaxation is subordinate to business whereas business itself is subordinate to leisure. And man, if his business is not for the sake of his leisure, is a kind of slave.

A German philosopher of the present time [. . .][xxvii] has made this very sound remark for understanding this thought of Aristotle's.[8] How is leisure time, or some kind of leisure time, still called in ordinary sensible language? Holidays. And what does holidays originally mean?

Student: Holy days.

LS: Holy days. And what do you do on holy days? You devote them to the contemplation of and devotion to the holy, and this is of course superior to business. And one of our difficulties today is that we cannot find a substitute for holy days. It is in another way the same problem we have regarding the question of a substitute for war. Now Aristotle says the leisure of the gentlemen must be devoted to such things as conversation among them and enjoyment of music, poetry, painting, and such matters. Now this is higher than what they do in the marketplace. It consists in the common sharing, through speaking, listening, and seeing, of the beautiful things, not in doing the beautiful things—that they do in battle or in the marketplace—but in speaking, listening, and seeing. We can also say

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[xxvi] *Politics* 7.1334a29–1335b1.

[xxvii] The transcript has a blank space here. Strauss might be referring to Josef Pieper, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, trans. Alexander Dru (London: Faber & Faber, 1952).

here again that the leisure activity of the gentlemen is again a reflection of the theoretical life. In their way—not too impressive a way, but in their way these gentlemen devote their leisure to the contemplation of the beautiful.

Now Aristotle's presentation of the best regime in books 7 and 8 can be dismissed in the spirit of Machiavelli as the presentation of an imagined or imaginary commonwealth: wholly impractical. Aristotle doesn't give any indication that there ever was such a best regime. Certain particular ingredients, yes; the whole, never. He himself never claims that it was actual anywhere, anytime. Yet he claims that it is possible: there is no intrinsic impossibility of a society of well-bred and public-spirited men. This is not fantastic because it does not exclude the appearance here and there of some black sheep—every family has its black sheep here and there—provided the black sheep are treated as black sheep, and then nothing happens. I mean, if they are given the same respect as the white sheep, then there would be problems. And such a society of well-bred and public-spirited men is the good society. We can still defend it if we make one assumption: the assumption of an economy of scarcity. This assumption was in fact made, and necessarily so, by everyone until a very short time ago. In an economy of scarcity only a very small part of the population has the possibility of becoming educated in a politically relevant sense. I mean not merely learning the law which was transmitted from generation to generation, but to enable them to act wisely, and no sensible man can wish the rule of the uneducated who are more likely than not to become the prey of fanatical rabble-rousers and the lot. Aristotle would deserve blame only if he had neglected to pay attention to the actual regimes, however imperfect, and this he surely did not.

And now I turn to the subject of the central books of the *Politics*, books 4 to 6. But before I go on, is there anything which you wish to clarify? Is the connection of the discussion in books 7 and 8 to that in books 2 and 3 clear? Because that is in a way the nerve of the whole book. Well, we go on.

Now at the end of book 3, we are directed in one way to books 7 and 8 by the fact that the last sentence of book 3 is identical to the first sentence of book 7. By the mere order as the manuscripts have it, we are otherwise directed from book 3 to books 4 and 6, and these are the books which do not deal with the best regime.[9]

May I sit down? Mr. Bruell. Thank you. The beginning of book 4, and omit Barker's insertions.

Reader:[xxviii]
There is a rule which applies to all the practical arts and sciences, when they have come to cover the whole of a subject, and are no longer engaged in investigating it bit by bit. Each of them severally has to consider the different methods appropriate to the different categories of its subject. For instance, the art of physical training has to consider (1) which type of training is appropriate to which type of physique; (2) which is the best[xxix] type of training—i.e. the training best for a physique of the best endowment and the best

[xxviii] Mr. Bruell serves as reader.
[xxix] In the place of "best" Barker has "ideal."

equipment (for the best[xxx] type of training must be suitable for such a physique); and (3) which is the type of training that can be generally applied to the majority of physiques—for that too is one of the problems to be solved by the art of physical training. Nor is this all. (4) There may be men who want to have physical training, but do not want to attain the standard of skill and condition which is needed for competitions; and here the trainer and gymnastic master have still another duty—to impart the degree of capacity which is all that such men want. What is true of the art of physical training is obviously no less true of medicine, or of shipbuilding, tailoring, and all the other arts. It follows that the study of politics[xxxi] must be equally comprehensive. First, it has to consider which is the best constitution, and what qualities a constitution must have to come closest to the ideal when there are no external factors[xxxii] to hinder its doing so.

LS: In other words, the best might not always be possible, and for some people the best regime might be bad. The best form of physical training might be bad for a sick man, so you have to adapt the regime to the people concerned.

Reader:
Secondly, politics has to consider which sort of constitution suits which sort of civic body. The attainment of the best regime is likely to be impossible for the general run of states; and the good law-giver and the true statesman must therefore have their eyes open not only to what is the absolute best, but also to what is the best in relation to actual conditions. Thirdly, politics has also to consider the sort of regime which depends upon an assumption. In other words, the student of politics must also be able to study a *given* constitution, just as it stands and simply with a view to explaining how it may have arisen and how it may be made to enjoy the longest possible life.

LS: The question is not, "Is it the best regime for these people?" but rather, "What is the established regime?" This alone has a true equivalent in present-day political science. Then the question arises: How can this be preserved?

Reader:
The sort of case which we have in mind is one where a state has neither the ideally best regime (or even the elementary conditions needed for it) nor the best regime possible under the actual conditions, but has only a regime of an inferior type. Fourthly, and in addition to all these functions, politics has also to provide a knowledge of the type of regime which is best suited to cities[xxxiii] in general. Most of the writers who treat of politics—good as they may be in other respects—fail when they come to deal with matters of practical *utility*. We have not only to study the[xxxiv] best regime. We have also to study the type of regime which is practicable—[xxxv]

[xxx] Barker has "ideal."
[xxxi] Barker interpolates "[which belongs to the practical arts and sciences]."
[xxxii] Barker inserts the interpolation "[e.g. want of means, or unequal distribution of means]."
[xxxiii] In the place of "cities" Barker writes "states."
[xxxiv] The word "ideally" is here inserted in the Barker translation.
[xxxv] The translation includes the interpolation "[i.e. the best for a state under actual conditions]."

LS: "Feasible."

Reader:
and with it, and equally, the type which is easiest to work and most suitable to states generally. As things are, writers fall into two different classes. Some confine their investigations to the extreme of perfection, which requires a large equipment.[xxxvi] The rest, addressing themselves rather to an attainable form, still banish from view the general range of existing regimes, and simply extol the Spartan or some other *one* regime. The sort of political[xxxvii] system which ought to be proposed is one which men can be easily induced, and will be readily able, to graft onto the system they already have. It is as difficult a matter to reform an old constitution as it is to construct a new one; as hard to unlearn a lesson as it was to learn it initially.[xxxviii]

LS: Let us stop here. Aristotle raises here the claim, you see, that if political science is the study of regimes, he is the founder of this discipline . . . because prior to him people were concerned only with the best, say, Plato, or they were enamored of one particular regime, say, Sparta, and praised the Spartans. But a true scientific, theoretical approach comprehends all regimes at least in principle; and that was not attempted by anyone, at least before him. Now in this respect Aristotle's notion of political science agrees with the notion of political science now prevailing. No kind of political or social organization must be disregarded; some may not be terribly important, but in principle they all are within the province of political science. But what is the difference[10] [between] Aristotle's broad concept of political science and the positivistic concept? Yes?

Student: Well, the study of regimes is still ordered by the possibility, at least in thought, of a best regime, which would have certain features, and which other regimes would be more or less similar to.

LS: Yes. In other words, there is an order of rank among regimes—that is absolutely essential—and something else connected with that. Fundamentally, Aristotle's political science, as indicated by what he says, is guided by a practical intent: it addresses people who wish to establish a regime and teaches them how to go about it. It is not simply theoretical. Perhaps we may go on from where we left off.

Reader:
The true statesman, therefore, must not confine himself to the matters we have just mentioned the study of the best regime, or that of some one particular form such as the Spartan:[xxxix] he must also be able, as we said previously, to help *any* existing regime along the path of reform.[xl] He cannot do so unless he knows how many different[xli]

[xxxvi] Barker interpolates "[of initial advantages]."
[xxxvii] In the place of "political" Barker writes "constitutional."
[xxxviii] *Politics* 4.1288b10–1289a5.
[xxxix] Barker interpolates "[the study of the ideally best constitution, or that of some one particular form such as the Spartan]."
[xl] Barker presents "[along the path of reform]" as an interpolation.
[xli] The reader omits "kinds of."

regimes there are. As things are, we find people believing that there is only one sort of democracy or oligarchy. This is an error.[xlii]

LS: So Aristotle, loyal to his scientific intent, wants to have a detailed discussion of all regimes, and preferably of those which are his main interest, democracy and oligarchy. But here we have to do one thing, which is the first step that Aristotle takes: never forget that democracy means a *variety* of regimes, and so does oligarchy. In other words, in our language of today: no abstractness, no schemas. We have to look at each kind of democracy, we must in fact find out if it makes sense to bring these various kinds together under one heading; otherwise, it would be a misleading term. Now [in] books 4 to 6, the central books, these are the regimes other than the best—the best being aristocracy (books 7 and 8) and kingship, which is, however, almost a will-o'-the-wisp. What is the reason for the variety of regimes? Aristotle raises this question again. He doesn't leave it at the fact of the variety, which no one can deny, but why is it so, why is it necessary? The reason for the variety of regimes is the fact that the city necessarily consists of a number of parts: farmers, artisans, etc. According to the preponderance of one or the other part, there is a variety of regimes. There will always be a preponderance of some part or a combination of parts, and this preponderant thing gives the regime its character. He enumerates these parts again: farmers, artisans, traders, manual workers, fighters, judges, deliberators. (Deliberators means always legislators, as we said before.) Some of these parts may be combined, for example, the farmers may be fighters, without any difficulty. But where does the difficulty arise? I don't believe we have time to read—yes, this is of some interest: 1291a33. There is one part which he had not enumerated as such.[xliii] "The seventh part."

Reader:
The seventh part is the group composed of the rich, who serve the city with their property. The eighth part is the magistrates, who serve the state in its offices. No city can exist without a government—

LS: Without magistrates, he means here.

Reader:
and there must therefore be persons capable of discharging the duties of office and rendering the state that service, permanently or in rotation. There only remain the two parts which have just been mentioned in passing—the deliberative part, and the part which decides on the rights of litigants. These are parts which ought to exist in all cities, and to exist on a good and just basis; and this demands persons of a good quality in matters political.[xliv] The different capacities belonging to the other parts may, it is generally held, be shown by one and the same group of persons.[xlv]

[xlii] *Politics* 4.1289a5–11.
[xliii] Aristotle fails to enumerate the sixth member of his list.
[xliv] The interpolation "[Here we begin to confront a difficulty]" is omitted.
[xlv] *Politics* 4.1291a33–b3.

LS: In other words, the farmer may be a fighting man, a member of the deliberative assembly, and he may even have a trade of sorts. But one thing is absolutely impossible, one combination, namely, what he speaks about now.

Reader:
The same persons cannot be both rich and poor.

LS: This combination is evidently impossible. And the consequence is what?

Reader:
This will explain why these two classes—the rich and the poor—are regarded as parts of the state in a special and peculiar sense. Nor is this all. One of these classes being small, and the other large, they also appear to be *opposite* parts. This is why they both form regimes to suit their own interest.[xlvi] It is also the reason why men think there are only two regimes—democracy and oligarchy.[xlvii]

LS: This popular prejudice that there are only two regimes has a respectable reason—not sufficient, however—the argument being the incompatibility of being rich and poor on the part of the same man, therefore two parts of the city. Now this is a crude view but not groundless. As Aristotle states in the sequel, it is simply not good enough, and the chief reason is that there are various kinds of democracies and oligarchies; and this he develops at length afterwards. We will discuss it at length next time. In both democracy and oligarchy there is a preferred type; in other words, a democracy which is relatively close to oligarchy, and an oligarchy which is relatively close to democracy. The two diverge otherwise, and each becomes worse and worse. And the preferred type of democracy is the rural democracy. The majority of the citizens are farmers, who don't like to come to town every day and can't afford it, and are perfectly satisfied if they have the right to vote, as we would call it—not the right to judge or to legislate—and leave these matters more or less to gentlemen of their trust. Nevertheless, it is a democracy because those to whom everyone in the city, regardless of how high they are, remain responsible are the citizen body without practically any property qualification.

We will take up other questions regarding democracy. I would like to draw your attention now to one part of this central section, and that is book 5, devoted to changes of regime or, as people frequently call it, revolution. This is one of the most "realistic" parts of Aristotle's *Politics*. But let us never forget that which is so minimized in part of the popular literature: however realistic Aristotle may be, he clings to the notion of his teacher Plato that there is and must be a best regime, in the light of which political judgments alone can ultimately be justified. And it is not important whether this regime is actual, or has been or will be actual, it must be possible in deed. On the other hand, Aristotle never forgets the fact that most of the time we are concerned with imperfect regimes, and we have to have had a[s] good and close an understanding of the imperfect regimes as possible. But precisely if we want to have a good understanding of imperfect regimes, we must know that they are imperfect, as part of the fact, just as to know that a

[xlvi] Barker interpolates "[that of wealth in the one case, and that of numbers in the other]."
[xlvii] 4.1291b7–13.

man who suffers from angina pectoris is sick is part of the fact of his being at that time. Diseases, decay, corruption—these are all factual things and don't have to be mentioned in quotation marks but as we do it in everyday life, without quotation marks. There are dubious cases, where one hesitates to say whether there was corruption or decay, but in which field of studies are there not borderline cases? That is no objection per se.

Now is there any point any one of you would like to take up? Failing that, I will remind you of the fact that if everything goes well, we will have our last class next Monday, and the following Wednesday . . . you will be compelled to reveal your mental nakedness.[xlviii] [Laughter]

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[1] Deleted "As therefore."
[2] Deleted "they."
[3] Deleted "has."
[4] Moved "among them."
[5] Deleted "Now Aristotle."
[6] Deleted "well."
[7] Deleted "implies, this."
[8] Deleted "Now."
[9] Deleted "The spirit of these books."
[10] Deleted "of."

[xlviii] Note the allusion to *Charmides*154d.

Session 15: March 10, 1965

Aristotle, *Politics*, books 4, 5, and 6

Leo Strauss: To continue Aristotle's argument regarding the best regime, we turn to the statement at the beginning of book 4, where Aristotle gives a broad outline of the scope of political science as a whole. He makes it clear beyond the shadow of a doubt that political science must be greatly concerned with imperfect regimes, which means in simple language with actual regimes, and with special emphasis on democracy and oligarchy. There he takes issue with the crude view that there is only the alternative of democracy or oligarchy, but he adds that this popular view is not entirely groundless, that there is a kind of tendency of the city to be either democratic or oligarchic. But still, this is not enough, one reason being that there are various kinds of democracies and oligarchies. And at this point we may begin, 1291b14.

Reader:
The fact that there are a number of constitutions, and the causes of that fact, have already been established. We may now go on to say that there are also a number of varieties of two of these constitutions—democracy and oligarchy. This is already clear from what has been said.[i] These two regimes vary because the people (*dēmos*) and the class called the notables vary. So far as the people are concerned, one sort is engaged in farming; the[ii] second sort is engaged in the arts and crafts; and the[iii] third is the marketing sort, which is engaged in buying and selling; a fourth is the maritime sort, which in turn is partly naval, partly mercantile, partly employed on ferries, partly engaged in fisheries.[iv] A fifth sort is composed of unskilled laborers and persons whose means are so small that they cannot enjoy any leisure.[v]

LS: No, this is another kind in addition to those mentioned.

Reader:
A sixth consists of those who are not of free birth by two citizen parents; and there may be others of a similar character.[vi] The notables fall into different sorts according to wealth, birth, merit, culture, and other qualities of the same order.[vii]

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[i] Barker has "from what has been previously said [at the beginning of the previous chapter]."
[ii] The indefinite "a" is used in Barker.
[iii] Barker counts this subdivision of the people indefinitely as "a" third; "and" is not in Barker.
[iv] The reader omits this passage: "(We may note that there are many places where one of these subdivisions forms a considerable body; as the fishermen do at Tarentum and Byzantium, the naval crews at Athens, the merchant seamen in Aegina and Chios, and the ferrymen at Tenedos.)"
[v] A comparison with Barker shows minor differences. "A fifth sort is composed of unskilled laborers and persons whose means are too small to enable them to enjoy any leisure."
[vi] The exact wording in Barker is "and there may also be other sorts of a similar character."
[vii] *Politics* 4.1291b14–30.

LS: In other words, if there should be any other kinds of the *dēmos*, of common people, or of the notables, for that matter, that could easily be inserted into the Aristotelian scheme without creating any theoretical problem. Now Aristotle, as will appear later, preferred the rule of *dēmos*, on a variety of grounds. One very important one is that they[viii] live upstate, so to speak, and they cannot come so conveniently to the assembly[1]; and they don't have too frequent assemblies, and they are in the main satisfied if they can elect and audit the magistrates and similar things. They simply have no time for that. Also, a consideration is that they are regarded as the better soldiers, which is for every political society important. This view, that the peasantry is the best soldiery, prevailed I think up to the First World War, and there it proved for the first time that the industrial workers could be at least as good if not better soldiers than the rural workers. That of course has to do with technology, which I have referred to frequently, which introduced a radical change into politics. But there is here a complication, which we also must consider in 1292b11. I give you these examples in order to show how broad the Aristotelian scheme of inquiry is.

Reader:
These are the several varieties of oligarchy and democracy. It should be noted, however, that in actual life, it is often the case that constitutions which are not legally democratic are made to work democratically by the habits and training of the people. Conversely, there are other cases where the legal regime is inclined toward democracy, but is made by training and habits to work in a way which inclines more toward oligarchy. This happens particularly after a revolution. The citizens do not change their temper immediately; and in the first stages the triumphant party is content to leave things largely alone, without taking[ix] any great advantage of its opponents. So the old laws remain in force, even though the party of the revolution is actually in power.[x]

LS: In other words, in order to see and understand a regime properly, we cannot limit ourselves to observing the laws, say, the written constitution. We also must consider the habits of the people. There may be a habitual deference to the notables, [those] of great political importance, which doesn't find any legal expression. So what is meant very frequently by the contribution of a political sociology which looks at the actual society as distinguished from the legal–political arrangement is for Aristotle a matter of course. There is another point of this nature to consider, at 1293b14. He speaks there of a polity which looks at wealth, virtue, and the *dēmos*, as in Carthage. This is aristocratic. Note "aristocracy" is here used in this whole discussion of the fourth book in a popular sense, not a strict sense. In other words, the kinds of regimes which are called by the people aristocratic.

Reader:

[viii] That is, the common people.
[ix] Barker has "without seeking to take."
[x] Barker: "The result is that the old laws remain in force, even though the party of revolution is actually in power." *Politics* 4.1292b11–21.

Accordingly a constitution which takes account of[xi] all three factors—wealth, virtue, and numbers—as the Carthaginian does, may be called an aristocratic regime; and the same may also be said of constitutions, such as the Spartan, which pay regard only to the two factors of goodness and numbers—

LS: Well, let us say, "virtue and the *dēmos*"—

Reader:
and where there is thus a mixture of the democratic and the aristocratic principle.[xii] We may—

LS: That is all we need. In order to understand this more fully, let us turn to 1294b7: "As it seems to be democratic that the magistracies are elected by lot."[xiii]

Reader:
In the appointment of magistrates, for example, the use of the lot is regarded as democratic, and the use of the vote as oligarchical. Again, it is considered to be democratic that a property qualification should not be required, and oligarchical that it should be. Here, accordingly, the mode appropriate to an aristocracy[xiv] or a "polity" is to take one form from one regime[xv] and another from another—[xvi] to take from oligarchy the rule that magistrates should be appointed by vote, and from democracy the rule that no property qualification should be required.[xvii]

LS: Democracy strictly understood, insisting on equality, would like to make all offices available by lot, because only if they are made available by lot is there a serious chance for every citizen, however humble, to become a magistrate because if they are elected as individuals, we look at merit.[2] We may be mistaken as to what constitutes merit, but the principle is this: not everyone who has the right to vote as a citizen is therefore fit to be a magistrate—an undemocratic, unegalitarian thought. And I think it is also clear that property qualification is incompatible with democracy and is a necessity in an oligarchy. Then an aristocracy in the vulgar sense needs to take institutions from both sides: from oligarchy, the appointment of magistrates by election; and from democracy, no property qualification. From this I think you see immediately that modern democracy is a mixture of democracy and oligarchy or, more precisely, is an aristocracy in the common or vulgar sense of the term. We must keep this in mind in order not to think that Aristotle's criticism of democracy is unfair. Modern democracy has taken care of many of Aristotle's objections. And now there is another consideration, indicated at the beginning of page 180.

[xi] In the place of "takes account of" Barker has "pays regard to."
[xii] *Politics* 4.1293b14–18.
[xiii] A more literal translation than Barker's, which follows.
[xiv] Barker interpolates "[of the mixed sort]."
[xv] In the place of "one form from one regime" Barker has "one element from one form of constitution."
[xvi] The reader omits "that is to say."
[xvii] *Politics* 4.1294b7–13.

Reader:
We have now to consider what is the best regime and the best way of life for the *majority* of cities and men. In doing so we shall not employ[xviii] a standard of excellence above the reach of ordinary men—

LS: In other words, not that standard which Aristotle employed in describing *the* best regime in books 6, 7, and 8.

Reader:
or a standard of education requiring exceptional endowments and equipment.[xix] We shall only be concerned with the standard of life which most men are able to share and the sort of regime which is possible for most people.[xx]

LS: This is one important consideration for political science to find out: which regime not absolutely is best but is the best which one can expect under ordinary circumstances.

Reader:
The 'aristocracies,' so called, of which we have just been treating—[xxi]

LS: The so-called [aristocracies are those which][3] are generally regarded as aristocracies, even though they are not so in the strict, Aristotelian, sense.

Reader:
either lie, at one extreme, beyond the reach of most states, or they approach, at the other, so closely to the regime called "polity," that they need not be considered separately.[xxii] The issues we have just raised can all be decided in the light of one body of fundamental principles. If we adopt as true the statements made in the *Ethics*—(1) that a truly happy life is a life of goodness free from impediments, and (2) that goodness consists in a mean—it follows that the best way of life is one which attains the mean.[xxiii] Further, the same criteria which determine whether the citizen-body[xxiv] have a good or bad way of life must also apply to the regime; for a regime is the way of life of a citizen-body. In all cities there may be distinguished three parts[xxv] of the citizen body—the very rich; the very poor; and the middle class which forms the mean. Now it is admitted, as a general

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[xviii] The reader omits the interpolation "[for the purpose of measuring 'the best']."
[xix] Barker's translation contains the insertion "or the standard of a constitution which attains an ideal height."
[xx] Here is the exact wording in Barker. "We shall only be concerned with the sort of life which most men are able to share and the sort of constitution which it is possible for most states to enjoy."
[xxi] Barker interpolates "[will not serve us for this purpose: they]."
[xxii] The reader omits "and must be treated as identical with it."
[xxiii] Barker has "it follows that the best way of life [for the *majority* of men] is one which consists in a mean, and a mean of the kind attainable by every individual."
[xxiv] Inserted here in Barker is the interpolation "[i.e. all its members, considered as *individuals*]."
[xxv] Barker adds "or classes."

principle, that moderation and the mean are the[xxvi] best. We may therefore conclude that in the ownership of all gifts of fortune a middle condition will be the best. Men who are in this condition are the most ready to listen to reason. Therefore men[xxvii] who belong to either extreme—the over-handsome, the over-strong, the over-noble, the over-wealthy; or the opposite,[xxviii] the over-poor, the over-weak, the utterly ignoble—find it hard to follow the lead of reason. Men in the first class tend to violence:[xxix] and men in the second tend too much to roguery and petty offenses; and most wrongdoing arises either from violence or roguery.[xxx]

LS: "Violence" is perhaps not the best word: "from insolence," insolence bred by great power, wealth, and so on. There can be crime arising from insolence, from a feeling of being superior to others, and there can be crime or defects which stem from feeling that you are an underdog, and this has more to do with petty crime. This one sentence was not translated literally enough: "the regime is some kind of way of life of the city." Or as Isocrates, orator of Plato's time, put it: the regime is the soul of the city, that which gives it its life and its character. And the reason is that the regime indicates what the end is for which the society is dedicated, and at the same time it indicates the men most akin to that goal, so that in an oligarchy, based on wealth, the men who rule are most akin to that goal: the wealthy. And if it is virtue, the same would follow. The answer to Aristotle's question, "What is the best regime on the average?" is then one which is the rule of the middle class. Now in the sequel he makes clear that it is not necessary that the middle class be the majority, which is sometimes possible perhaps, but the main point is that it can tip the balance, so that by either joining with the lower class against the higher class, or vice versa, it is in fact in control. And the proof of the superiority of the middle class, a popular proof: he notes the fact that the most celebrated legislators, men like Solon and Lycurgus, were middle-class men. "Middle-class" does not mean bourgeois; "bourgeois" is a name for a certain kind of middle class which arose in modern times.

To mention this in passing, the notion of the bourgeois arose in contradistinction to that of the citizen in Rousseau, who makes it clear they are two different things. "The bourgeois" simply meant at that time the average denizens of the city, the burghers, especially under the French monarchy.[4] Of course these men were entirely powerless and led an absolutely private life, whereas the citizen, as Rousseau, restating the ancient use, said[5], is a man who leads a political life. Now this was taken up by Hegel, who accepted the Rousseauan distinction and defines the bourgeois by fear of violent death. The Hobbean origin of the term is obvious, meaning they are not soldiers, they do not fight for their country. The fighting was done either by the hereditary nobility or by the scum of the country forced into the army. The citizen is a man who fights for his country and who is an active participant in political power. And the Marxian use of "bourgeois" is simply a modification necessitated by Marx's so-called economic interpretation.

[xxvi] In the place of "the" Barker has "always."
[xxvii] In the place of "therefore men" Barker has "those."
[xxviii] Barker translates "or at the opposite end."
[xxix] Barker: "Men in the first class tend more to violence and serious crime."
[xxx] *Politics* 4.1295a25–b11.

This middle-class regime which Aristotle favors is rare, because in most cities the middle class is not in this beautiful position that it can determine the way; either the rich or the poor preponderate. Now in the sequel Aristotle makes clear that not every regime is possible everywhere. What is the chief condition of the possibility of a given regime? Answer: those who wish the preservation of the regime must be stronger than those who wish to destroy it. "Stronger" does not necessarily mean "more numerous," because we know it depends partly on the state of armaments and also on other things, what is strength in any actual contest. Finally, as far as this part of the argument is concerned, Aristotle points out that in the study of regimes, we must look of course at the meaning of institutions, not merely at their appearance.

Reader:
The devices adopted in regimes for fobbing the masses off with sham rights are five in number. They relate to the assembly; the magistracies; the law courts; the possession of arms; and the practice of athletics. As regards the assembly, all alike are allowed to attend; but fines for non-attendance are either imposed on the rich alone, or imposed on the rich at a far higher rate. As regards the magistracies, those who possess a property qualification are not allowed to decline office on oath, but the poor are allowed to do so.[xxxi]

LS: You see, this looks very friendly to the common people: they are not compelled to take up the burden of magistracy, but they may decline it. But the rich are forbidden to decline it. And reflection shows that this is, of course, an antidemocratic measure. So in order to understand political institutions properly, we must not merely listen to the wording of law, we must look at its exact meaning. Again, where sociological considerations are regarded as higher than political considerations in modern times, the latter means "merely *legal* considerations," and the merely legal considerations can be quite deceptive. I remember reading an article by an anticommunist who praised the Soviet Constitution of 1936 ("What a wonderful thing that is") without ever raising the question of whether it had any probability of becoming in any way practical. One can leave it at that. Let us turn now to more detailed things.

Reader:
We have now to treat of the next subject,[xxxii] and we have to do so both in general terms and separately for each regime. We must first find a proper basis for the treatment of the subject. We may lay it down that there are three elements, or "powers," in each regime, and that a good legislator[xxxiii] must consider what is expedient for it under each of these three heads. If all of them are constructed properly, the whole regime too will be constructed properly; and where they are constructed differently, regimes will also differ. The first of the three is the deliberative element concerned with common affairs, and its proper constitution: the second is the element of the magistracies (and here it has to be settled what these magistracies are to be, what matters they are to control, and how their

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[xxxi] *Politics* 4.1297a14–21.
[xxxii] The reader omits the interpolation [i.e. the proper method of establishing constitutions]."
[xxxiii] Barker interpolates "[in establishing a constitution]."

occupants are to be appointed): the third is the judicial element, and the proper constitution of that element.[xxxiv]

LS: Is this distinction known to you: the deliberative, the magistrative, and the judiciary? Obviously it is known, but in its Aristotelian meaning? What Aristotle has in mind is not a separation of powers; he makes a *distinction* of powers. Well, we cannot speak of powers; he says "parts," and of course, the same as in the modern view, the first is the deliberative, which includes legislative. Then what is now called "executive" is not called this by Aristotle, but "magistracies." What is wrong, [or misleading], with the term "executive"? [6] . . . Because the execution of the laws, simply, is a narrow view; not all magistrates execute laws. Locke, as you know very well, spoke of another power, the federative power. That has to do with foreign affairs and also with warfare in particular. And that the power of a general is, during war, not properly to be called executive unless you say he is given a command to invade the continent of Europe, as Eisenhower in this respect executed orders. But still, one cannot call it the execution of a law, and therefore "magistrates" is a broader term, generals being an outstanding form of magistrates in the Aristotelian sense. But this is not sufficient. What is the reason behind the fact that in Aristotle we find a distinction of powers, whereas in Montesquieu we find the doctrine of the separation of powers?

Student: Is it because the deliberative power is in essence the final power?

LS: Yes, but not quite, because[7] after all, if you are condemned by a judge, the law supplies only the major of the syllogism. But that you are the one who did these things, the minor of the syllogism, is not given by the law. That is to be found by the judge. The judicial power, as well as the power of the magistrate, cannot be reduced. The only point is that the deliberative power or function is the highest power. In that respect there is perfect agreement between Aristotle and the American Constitution, and of course also Montesquieu. But what is the difference between the Aristotelian doctrine of distinction of powers and Montesquieu in the doctrine of separation of powers?

Student: Whether or not the powers can be separated depends on the kind of regime with which you are dealing. In rule by philosophy, you wouldn't want a separation—

LS: Well, one could say this is an extreme case[8] which we as hardheaded political scientists might disregard.

Same student: In any case, it still would require a different sort of—you might not want to separate all three.

LS: Yes, but what is Montesquieu's solution to that?

Student: Whether or not you want a limited government?

LS: I believe it has something to do with that.

[xxxiv] *Politics* 4.1297b35–1298a3.

Student: The Aristotelian purpose is to distinguish between who should properly be carrying out the functions, for whom it is more appropriate . . .

LS: That is not the purpose. The purpose is that in fact there are three different functions and that these different functions are differently employed in different regimes.

Same student: I was going to say that you might go to Aristotle's conception of an organic society. You might analogize the parts of the body, each of which has separate functions, but they are not really separate.

LS: No, I don't believe this would be helpful. It is very dangerous to speak of "organic" in these matters because of the vagueness, and I would think one should try to avoid it if possible unless compelled by the text.

Student: I thought the separation of powers depended on the distinction between state and society—

LS: *Yes*, you can say that, but what does that distinction mean? . . . Well, to say it very simply . . . Yes?

Student: The purpose of separation of powers is to have a group of governing bodies that will check each other—

Different student: It protects the society from the state.

LS: That was already said before. . . . You see, we do not *know* what society is, we take that for granted. We explain an unknown by an unknown. Although colloquially that is always good, but from time to time we should not speak colloquially. Yes?

Student: In separation of powers, the assumption is that man is not really a social animal but he's out for his own good. It is a device to keep things going in that case. But with a distinction, it is the function that is important. You might find it in the same person or in different people.

LS: You started very well, but by your additional remarks you covered up the good beginning. Montesquieu's overriding[9] interest in this famous discussion in the eleventh book is the security for the individual, and this means society in contradistinction to the state is only a consequence of that.[xxxv 10]—Mr. Bruell, will you allow me?

Now to make that a bit clearer, because it is, I think, of some importance: Montesquieu's presentation is given in a quasi-historical form—I mean, not in general theoretical terms. He speaks of the British constitution. Now this description of the British constitution is modeled on a description of the Roman constitution given by the historian Polybius, a Greek familiar with Rome, in the second century. Polybius also speaks, sometimes very

[xxxv] The "eleventh book" sc. of Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*.

much reminding of Montesquieu, of something like checks and balances between the consuls, the Senate, and the popular assemblies. That is the crucial difference . . . and this political thought falls easily within the Aristotelian framework although it is not explicitly stated in Aristotle. But what is the key point? Very crudely stated: power may be misused and therefore it must be checked. The sum total of political power must be split up. This is common to Polybius and Montesquieu, but for Polybius there is no other principle involved. Polybius's checks and balances has nothing to do with the Aristotelian division of powers. As it were, the sum total of political power is divided into three big chunks, and how we draw the line does not make any difference: the main point is that every part, whether the consul or the Senate or the common people, have an important function but a limited part of the power. Now Montesquieu has[11] a principle not merely for the distribution of power—this follows from the difference of function. You cannot well have two generals the head of an army and so on, whereas the part of the polis which is concerned with legislation or deliberation may very well [consist], and should even consist, of a body of men. In certain other functions there must be a monarchic head: the simplest case is of course that of the army, but there are also other cases where someone must be—say, in an office—the one who has the last say.

So the division of powers has a principle of its own. The separation of powers has also a principle of its own, and the principle here is the greatest possible protection for the individual. If the same group, the same assembly of men who make the laws, have also the power of executing them, mere hatred of a particular individual, [the] accused, will make his case hopeless. But if there is independence of the judiciary, even if the law is very nasty and unfair, there is some protection. The judges may find reasons why this case may not be subsumed under the law in question.

Now this concern for the security of the individual, which of course exists also in Aristotle, is not the key consideration. And that is the meaning of Aristotle's statement that man is a political animal: the *polis* is prior to the individual, whereas according to the doctrine starting with Hobbes, the individual is prior to society. And the practical conclusions from that are immense. Now no one would assert any more that the individual is prior to society. That very notion of the state of nature has completely disappeared from modern social science, as you surely know, and therefore the question of the individual and individualism has also become somewhat obscured. Individualism had a very clear meaning when it meant [that] man is not by nature a social animal but society is the work of individuals. An untenable view, but at least a clear view. Now we take[12] for granted [today] that man is a social animal, molded by society, and the question is that the rights of the individual have to be protected somehow against this state. But what about society? Is there not a possible totalitarianism of society which is not tyranny of government? Tyranny of government is an easily recognizable thing. Is there not a phenomenon which we call conformism? Not based on any law—you don't go to jail—but there is a kind of social ostracism which can be as hard for the individual as legal consequences. Now this is the price we have to pay for abandoning, with very good and powerful reasons, the notion that literally the individuals precede society and organize society as they as individuals see fit,[13] [in favor of the view] that man, wherever we find him, is already a "quote socialized" being and he can never step outside of society and

make demands on it. That is, the distinction between state and society is some help for preserving the libertarian notion in our age.

Book 5, to which we turn now in our very cursory study, is a high point in Aristotle's so-called realism. It contains a discussion of "revolutions," as we say; Aristotle says "changes of regime." "Revolution," as you know, means originally a revolving, coming back to the same point where we were before: the revolutions of the celestial bodies. Now people observed that there are also such comings-back, such returnings, in societies: beginnings, maturities, decays, and so on. The changes have one thing in common, change of direction: now you go this way, and afterward this way. But the use of "revolution" for a change of state is a very modern one. I do not know exactly how it came about, but probably [during the] seventeenth-eighteenth century.

Now in this discussion Aristotle considers not only the destruction of regimes but also their preservation. Among others, he discusses also the preservation of tyranny. You see, Aristotle can be very open-minded: that is the nearest approximation to "Machiavellianism" which we find in Aristotle. But there is an obvious difference between Aristotle's treatment of the preservation of tyranny and Machiavelli's treatment. In the first place, this discussion of tyranny is only a small part of the *Politics*, whereas one can say the whole *Prince* is devoted to the subject; and secondly, the monstrous character of tyranny is not for one moment concealed or denied by Aristotle, whereas Machiavelli does conceal it. When speaking about the causes of such revolutions, Aristotle does not mention ideology or anything like it. It is very illuminating to contrast this with Hobbes's doctrine, *Leviathan*, chapter 29: "Of those things that weaken or tend to the dissolution of the commonwealth," or the parallel of that in Hobbes's *De Cive*, where Hobbes emphasizes the crucial importance, for the avoiding of violent change, of what he calls seditious doctrines.[xxxvi] Well, in the seventeenth century, as we know, doctrines played a very great role in bringing about political change. That was not so in classical antiquity.

There is one point which I thought is particularly characteristic of Aristotle and which I thought we should read. In 1309a32, the beginning of a chapter: three things Aristotle discusses here which are the things preserving regimes. One of them is of course the character of the magistrates, the leading men.

Reader:
Three qualifications are necessary in those who have to fill the sovereign offices. The first is loyalty to the established regime. The second is a high degree of capacity for the duties of the office. The third is the quality of goodness and justice, in the particular form which suits the nature of each regime. (If the *principle* of justice varies from regime to regime, the *quality* of justice must also have its corresponding varieties.) Where these three qualifications are not united in a single person, a problem obviously arises: how is the choice to be made? A may possess, for instance, the second qualification, and have military capacity; but he may lack the other two, and be neither good in character nor

[xxxvi] *De Cive*, 12.

loyal to the regime. B may be just in character and loyal to the regime.[xxxvii] How are we to choose? It would seem that we ought to consider two points—which, on the whole, is the commoner qualification, and which of them is the rarer.[xxxviii] Thus, for a military office, we must have regard to military experience rather than character: military capacity is rare, and goodness is more common. For the post of custodian of property, or that of treasurer, we must follow the opposite rule: such posts require a standard of character above the average, but the knowledge which they demand is such as we all possess.[xxxix]

LS: Is this clear? A treasurer in the literal sense is a man who takes care of all the coins. The competence which he requires is not very great. He must know how thieves operate and he probably has some guards in addition, but the main point is that he is honest. And this kind of virtue is very common. But the competence required of a general is very different, and here one may have to close one's eyes. A general may not be very good as a democrat, and he may lead a very dissolute life. What did Lincoln say in the case of Grant, when he was accused of drinking too much? He inquired what kind of whiskey he drank, because he wanted to send it to the other generals. This is a very practical and sober discussion.

Reader:
A further problem may also be raised in regard to these three qualifications. If a man possesses the two qualifications of capacity and loyalty to the constitution, is there any need for him to have the third qualification of virtue, and will not the first two, by themselves, secure the public interest?

LS: That's very interesting, because it is a very tough and low and solid view. If he is very loyal, absolutely loyal, to the regime—say, to democracy—and in addition he is very competent, why does he need virtue? Who cares? It's his private matter.

Reader:
We may answer this question by asking another. May not men who possess these first two qualifications be unable to command their passions? and is it not true that men who have no command of their passions will fail to serve their own interest—even though they possess self-knowledge and self-loyalty—and will equally fail to serve the public interest?[xl]

LS: In other words, Aristotle concludes that virtue is truly needed, even if he is very dependable. For if he lacks a certain self-control regarding anger, regarding desires, and so on, he can fail decisively. He makes in the immediate sequel another important point.

Reader:

[xxxvii] Barker interpolates "[but deficient in capacity]."
[xxxviii] Barker interpolates "[and on that basis we ought to choose the man with the rarer qualification.]"
[xxxix] *Politics* 5.1309a33–b8.
[xl] Barker adds the interpolation "[even though they possess a knowledge of public affairs and public loyalty]." *Politics* 5.1309b8–14.

Generally, we may add, a regime will tend to be preserved by the observance of all the legal rules already suggested, in the course of our argument, as making for constitutional stability. Here we may note, as of paramount importance, the elementary principle which has been again and again suggested—the principle of ensuring that the number of those who wish a regime to continue shall be greater than the number of those who do not.

In addition to all these things, there is another which ought to be remembered, but which, in fact, is forgotten in perverted forms of government. This is the value of the mean. Many of the measures which are reckoned democratic really undermine democracies: many which are reckoned oligarchical actually undermine oligarchies. The partisans of either of these forms of government, each thinking their own the only right form, push matters to an extreme. They fail to see that proportion is as necessary to a regime as it is (let us say) to a nose. A nose may deviate in some degree from the ideal of straightness, and incline towards the hooked or the snub, without ceasing to be well shaped and agreeable to the eye. But push the deviation still further towards either of these extremes, and the nose will begin to be out of proportion with the rest of the face—[xli]

LS: In other words, it will be an ugly nose, whereas a snub nose can still be, as Aristotle says, beautiful and gracious, charming. But if it goes further, the face will be disfigured. And then the last stage?

Reader:
Carry it further still, and it will cease to look like a nose at all, because it will go too far toward one, and too far away from the other, of these two opposite extremes.[xlii]

LS: It will not only cease to look like a nose; it will cease to be a nose, if it goes still a step further.

Reader:
What is true of the nose, and of other parts of the body, is true also of regimes. Both oligarchy and democracy may be tolerable forms of government, even though they deviate from the ideal. But if you push either of them further still in the direction to which it tends, you will begin by making it a worse regime, and you may end by turning it into something which is not a regime at all.[xliii]

LS: Now that is of course a very important point with which we all are familiar in one way or another. Something may be in itself much more democratic a measure than the alternative, and yet what is more democratic may be ruinous to democracy. An example—which is controversial, I know, but there is some truth in it—was proportional representation, said to be much more democratic than otherwise because every vote will be counted, especially if there is a kind of total addition of the votes of a whole community. This may require the abandonment of some proposals which in themselves, strictly taken, are more democratic.

[xli] 5.1309b14–27.
[xlii] 5.1309b27–29.
[xliii] 5.1309b29–35.

Yet the most important thing for the preservation of regimes is of course education, and it must be specific education, different in a democracy from that in an oligarchy, etc. And here he says [that] in the case of democracy, a development of the habits by which democracy is maintained . . . and not habits which happen to be popular at the moment. There is a certain difficulty here because it seems to be democratic to choose the populace, but democracy which understands itself, while admitting the principle of the popular, must use a certain qualification in its application. In other words, democracy is not simply rule of the popular will but rule of the will favorable to the people, and something may be favorable to the people without being popular. The simplest example I know is the demobilization of the United States in Europe after the Second World War. It would have been absolutely impossible to keep up a strong army in Europe because of the disinclination of the large majority of the people to "keep the boys over there." And no one then, neither President Truman nor anyone else who spoke up at least, raised the question whether keeping the boys there might not be the best guarantee for not sending them there within a very short time. Let us turn to 1310a-b.

Reader:
We have still, however, to treat of the causes of destruction, and the means of preservation, when the government is a monarchy. Generally, what has already been said of constitutions proper is almost equally true of kingships and tyrannies.[xliv]

LS: Here I want to draw attention to the usage. "Regimes," *politeiai*, here means, obviously, nonmonarchical regimes, i.e., republics. And this shows that the distinction, the former distinction, between monarchy and republic was known to Aristotle. Plato's *Republic* is in Greek titled *Politeia*, a word which I translate by "regime," and it of course has this double meaning already, not necessarily monarchical.

Book 6 is devoted to a still more detailed study of the practically most important regimes, that is, democracy and oligarchy. We should read the general statement about democracy, because that is very important for understanding our own democratic convictions.

Reader:
The assumption underlying the democratic regime is liberty. (This, it is commonly said, can only be enjoyed in democracy; and this, it is also said, is the aim of every democracy.) Liberty has more than one form. One of its forms[xlv] consists in the interchange of ruling and being ruled. The democratic conception of justice is the enjoyment of arithmetical equality, and not the enjoyment of proportionate equality on the basis of desert.

LS: In other words, everyone gets the same regardless of his deserts, and not what he deserves.

Reader:

[xliv] *Politics* 5.1310a39–b2.
[xlv] Barker inserts here the interpolation "[is the political, which]."

On the[xlvi] arithmetical conception of justice the masses must necessarily be sovereign—

LS: "The masses" of course doesn't exist. "The multitude." "Masses" is a term stemming from modern mechanics (the seventeenth century), and then taken over, especially through the French Revolution, and popularized. *La vie en masse*. There are no masses there.

Reader:
The multitude[xlvii] must necessarily be sovereign; the will of the majority must be ultimate and must be the expression of justice. The argument is that each citizen should be on an equality with the rest; and the result which follows in democracies is that the poor—they being in a majority, and the will of the majority being sovereign—are more sovereign than the rich. Such is the first form of liberty, which all democracies agree in making the aim of their sort of regime. The other form[xlviii] consists in "living as you like." Such a life, the democrats argue, is the function of the free man, just as the function of slaves is *not* to live as they like. This is the second aim of democracy. Its issue is, ideally, freedom from any interference of government, and, failing that, such freedom as comes from the interchange of ruling and being ruled. It contributes, in this way, to a general system of liberty based on equality.[xlix]

LS: That is the most fundamental statement about the principle of democracy which we find in Aristotle, therefore we should look at it for one moment. There are two characteristics. The first is freedom, and that has two decisive parts: ruling and being ruled in turn for every citizen. No citizen is simply a subject, he shall also be a ruler—if not now, after the next election. The next is to live as one likes, or permissive egalitarianism. That is strange. Could there not be an austere, Puritan democracy, very egalitarian and yet not permissive? That is excluded by Aristotle and, I believe, also excluded by modern theory, but is it not in itself possible? —You think not?

Mr. Levy: [. . .] the reason, I take it, is that virtue can't be maintained in a regime when the many have become rulers, because the *many* are *unvirtuous*.

LS: You go very far [laughter]—you may very well be accused of sedition! But more precisely, the things which are sometimes called Puritan democracy or close to it, for example, in New England, or in Islam, and perhaps certain things in the Old Testament, for that matter—[14] [these are] purely theocratic: under God and under the divine law things are democratically and equally distributed, but there is a law which is not made by the citizen body, however defective or however good. In other words, we should not call these kinds of regimes simple democracies, we should say these are theocracies. They can of course also be monarchistic. The end of democracy is freedom, and a free man is one who is not bossed around by anyone. An unfree man must obey his boss—whether the boss is a master in the old sense or whether he is one's officer in an office, a boss can

[xlvi] Barker has "this."
[xlvii] On Strauss's suggestion, the reader substitutes "the multitude" for Barker's "the masses."
[xlviii] Barker interpolates "[is the civil, which]."
[xlix] *Politics* 6.1317a40–b17.

boss around and no free man likes to be bossed around. That is quite clear. But unfortunately it is altogether impossible. Everyone living in society, unless he is an absolute monarch, is being bossed around by somebody, and even the president of the United States will soon be bossed around by certain committees or legislators. So how can we get the closest approximation to that freedom which we like? Answer: if we are never ruled by anybody who is not in his turn also ruled by us. Political equality. Someone has the right to boss [me] around, but a year from now I have a chance to boss him around. So bossing is necessary, but if it is properly distributed it is no longer resented because, while I have the burden of being bossed, I also have the pleasure of bossing. And that makes up for it.

Some things in Aristotle remind one of Rousseau, but there is a very great difference between Aristotle and Rousseau which is immediately relevant. Aristotle does not suggest for one moment here that in a democracy there must be a total submission of everyone in every respect to the general will. This would not be fair. If so, then we would not have this permissiveness; it is as important for freedom in the democratic sense as egalitarianism. This we want: to live as we like, again within the limits of the possible—an easygoing egalitarianism. Now if you read Pericles's funeral speech you find something like this stated there: easygoingness is contrasted to the tough discipline of the Spartan regime. (Pericles does not speak of democracy, mind you; he speaks of the Athenian regime, and how you call it, that he leaves to you.) What characterizes their regime is the degree of public-spiritedness and of dedication to the city which you find, according to Pericles, nowhere else.[1] This of course is not a part of what Aristotle says in attempting to describe democracy as such and not Athenian democracy. We may say [that] for the sake of freedom, there can be only a limited equality, political equality, because a complete equality, say, social equality, would then interfere much too much with permissiveness. It is of course understood, although not said here, that only a part of the inhabitants of the city will be citizens. There will be slaves, and it will be very difficult for foreigners to become citizens. In other words, there are no rights of men—not according to Aristotle's view only, but according to ancient democracy itself. Freedom is not a right, but a privilege, that is the tacit premise.

Now this much about the theory of democracy, if you can call that a theory. That is the whole "quote ideology" of democracy. Can you call this an ideology? I would say no, because there is no reference to any other principle taken from nature, or metaphysics, or theology, or any science. It is simply based on the feeling of the majority of the people—"I don't want to be bossed"—and the two implications I stated. If this were given sophisticated justification of one kind or another—but this is not even attempted. These [are][15] like sturdy people who have done their fighting when they were in their younger years and know they are the sons of the soil, stemming by their descent from many generations. You know, they were the ones who defeated the Persians in the Persian Wars; that is enough. It would be a gross injustice to these men to say that is an ideology. That they have opinions, that is undeniable, but to call this an ideology, there is something fundamentally wrong with that.

[1] Thucydides 2.37–39.

Now in order to see Aristotle's procedure, let us read the immediate sequel.

Reader:
Such being the hypothesis[li] of democracy, and the root from which it develops, we can now proceed to study its attributes or institutions. There is the election of officers *by* all, and *from* all; there is the system of all ruling over each, and each, in his turn, over all; there is the method of appointing by lot to all offices—or, at any rate, to all which do not require some practical experience and professional skill; there is the rule that there should be no property-qualification for office—or, at any rate, the lowest possible; there is the rule that, apart from the military offices, there should be no office held twice by the same person—[lii]

LS: That is because generals of high caliber are very rare; thus Pericles was a general for ten years.

Reader:
or only on few occasions, and those relating to a few offices;[liii] and there is, finally, the rule that the tenure of every office—or, at any rate, of as many as possible—should be brief.[liv] There is the system of popular courts, composed of all the citizens or of persons selected from all, and competent to decide all cases—or, at any rate, most of them, and those the greatest and most important, such as the audit of official accounts, constitutional issues, and matters of contract.[lv] There is the rule that the popular assembly should be sovereign in all matters—or, at any rate, in the most important; and conversely that the executive magistracies should be sovereign in none—or, at any rate, in as few as possible.[lvi]

LS: I hope you seized the spirit of this enumeration. We know first the end of democracy, and in light of the end, we understand why these institutions prevail, for example, why certain offices are only for a short time: it gives them much greater[16] [time] for citizens to fill up these offices in their turn. I think it is a model of clarity as to how such analyses should be made . . . There are many things in these six books which deserve our attention, but we cannot take them up for now. Especially I would mention (you might read at home) in 1319b33 following what one can call the social policy in a democracy, what should be done by it in order to alleviate the fate of the poor, a subject now of great and immediate importance in this country. I would like to turn in conclusion to a broader subject which we will not be able to exhaust in any way today, but at least we can begin.

[li] The reader substitutes "hypothesis" for Barker's "ideal."
[lii] The Barker translation differs slightly: "no office should ever be held twice by the same person."
[liii] Restoring words from Barker: "or, at any rate, only on few occasions, and those relating only to a few offices."
[liv] Barker inserts the interpolation "[Under the head of the judicature]."
[lv] Barker interpolates "[Under the head of the deliberative]."
[lvi] *Politics* 6.1317b17–30.

Now what is the most obvious limitation of Aristotle's political science, from a method[olog]ical point of view? I will not go into the question of whether he was right or wrong on every point. The most obvious thing we can say is [that] he did not know anything of the regimes which are of particular interest to us, contemporary modern regimes, and he did not provide for them. For his schema of the six, as you will remember, does not make provision for inserting[17] such things as liberal democracy or communism. But I would contend that Aristotle provides for the modern regimes indirectly—indirectly because he enables us to understand the principle, the peculiar principle, of the modern regime. Now he does this by pointing to the question which answered in one way leads to the regimes known to him, and answered in another way leads to the modern view. What is that question?

In the third book he started from the polarity, the well-known polarity between democracy and oligarchy, but next passed to the polarity of democracy and kingship. In a radical sense, the city is as such democratic—in a radical sense. I have explained that. I remind you only of the fact that we have observed that the first definition of a citizen given in book 3 was democratic. Now what is this radical sense in which the city is as such democratic? If the *dēmos*, the common people, from which "democracy" is derived, is understood to comprise all nonphilosophers, from this point of view kings, noblemen, the rich and what have you are as much common people as the poorest working man. Or differently stated, the true gentleman is the philosopher. Now if this is true, then gentlemen in the ordinary sense of the term are so only by courtesy or by pretense. The absolute king, of whom he speaks toward the end of the third book, the Zeus-like ruler, is the political reflection of the philosopher, and only as such does he make sense in the context of the teaching of Aristotle as a whole. But of course, [as] we have seen in the seventh book, the rule of such a man is altogether impossible. The city is recalcitrant to philosophy. Socrates's condemnation was not accidental: there is a disharmony between philosophy and the city, a tension between philosophy and the city. The city needs popularly intelligible principles whatever the regime may be, and the true principles are not necessarily popularly intelligible. The city and the philosopher have different ends. This is, we can say, the premise of men like Aristotle and Plato.

But one can very well raise the question: Is this true? We have heard from modern philosophers such as Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, to mention only men from that heroic age of modern philosophy, that science is for the sake of power, for the relief of man's estate, for making man master and owner of nature. Now if this is the sound view, it follows that the ends of the philosopher and [of] the nonphilosophers are identical. If the end of the philosopher is to relieve man's estate, this end is not peculiar to the philosopher, only the philosophers can make a contribution which the non-philosophers cannot. Now this is one side of the question.

The other side is[18] [the belief] in modern times[19] that philosophy will not cease to be philosophy if it is diffused, if it is taken notice of, if it is taken in a fundamentally passive manner by listening, by mere reading, etc. In other words, philosophy calls for and is compatible with *enlightenment*. Enlightenment in its original form was of course a very limited affair. I think the first man who can be said to have started it, a Frenchman called

Fontenelle, presented the new cosmology to French nobility, who according to all ordinary social standards do not belong to the *demos*,[lvii] but they belong to the *dēmos* from the point of view of Descartes. Now as we know, since the eighteenth century and even more in our age, [this is] a matter[20] which is no longer seriously considered, so much so that John Dewey could identify the method of democracy with the method of, in most cases, discussion, debate—a thought which would be wholly unintelligible if stated in this way to Plato and Aristotle. Because the very simple thing is that in political debates, all kinds of assumptions will be made which are good enough for practical purposes [but] which in a theoretical discussion would never be permissible. Modern democracy rests on an anti-classic view of the relation of the city, the political society, and philosophy, and a part of this element is of course that modern science and philosophy are the same thing. [This] makes possible the economy of plenty, therefore the mass of the population can become educated, and therefore there is no longer any necessity that democracy should be the rule of the uneducated, as Aristotle says. In other words, the modern answer to Aristotle is that no one wants the rule of the uneducated, but who says that the majority of the population in a democracy must be or remain uneducated?

Here we are. Now as for communism and fascism, they do not affect this picture at all, because they are reactions to modern democracy in many ways and can only be understood on the basis of an understanding of modern democracy. If one does not consider this aspect of the question, that modern democracies are based massively on technology[21] [and], if we go deeper into their history, on the new notion of science developed in the seventeenth century[22] —if one does not take this into consideration one does not understand democracy. You cannot leave it at the mere phenomena as they strike you today at first glance, although one must surely know them, take cognizance of them; one must go into their depths, one must analyze them, and then I believe one arrives at an adequate understanding of the problem.

Now this much about the true limitations of Aristotle's political science,[23] at least if we remain within the limits of political science as now understood. But Aristotle's political science differed from present-day political science most obviously by the following fact: that his political science is the second part of a bipartite enterprise. The first part is called, in its literary presentation, the *Ethics*, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and today in political science the notion that ethics should be the first part, the basic part, of political science would be received not with incredulity but with ridicule. Whether this is the superiority of modern political science to the Aristotelian one is a long question into which we cannot go here. I have made some remarks about this subject from time to time.

The whole discussion in the *Politics*, we have seen, rests ultimately on the premise that there is such a thing as human virtue or excellence, and of course a variety of such virtues. But this is not elaborated there; the elaboration we find in the *Ethics*. The great question regarding the *Ethics*, which we will try to develop next time, concerns the character of the knowledge of these moral principles. Today of course this is also the

[lvii] Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657-1757), author and popularizer, incorporated elements of Cartesian physics in his book *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686).

issue, only this issue is regarded as foreclosed. There is no knowledge of moral principles, they are somehow imposed upon us by our society or whatnot, but there is not strictly speaking a knowledge of them as the true moral principles. Now this is certainly the obscurest point in Aristotle's *Ethics*: the cognitive status of the moral principles, and I will devote at least some part of the last meeting to this subject, and if we have still time, to make some remarks on the difference between Aristotle and Plato, the other great representative of classical political philosophy. Is there any point you wish to question? Yes, Mr. Levy?

Mr. Levy: What makes this book "philosophy"? How does it differ, for instance, from a highly competent statement like Ernest Barker's *Reflections on Government*, which is also a survey of regimes in a certain way? Or is it?

LS: Well, I have no objection to that. Barker, as he has shown to some extent at least by devoting so much labor to bringing out this honest and useful translation—Barker has no opposition to political philosophy. Why not? I have no objection. My criticism of Barker is simply this, and this means a questioning of him as a political philosopher: that Barker was fundamentally a Victorian. The great shocks which were applied to us in our century, especially after the First World War—which was already a big shock, as you know, but not comparable to what happened in the thirties—I believe did not give him occasion to reflect, to go deeper into political problems than he had done. In other words, there is a kind of dignified classicism in Barker which is in one way very attractive, at least to me, but in another way also not sufficient, because when the waves rise as high as they do in our age, then some toughness is needed in countering them which I do not find in Barker. Barker, in other words, continues in a certain British tradition represented by people like[24] T. H. Green; and that is now no longer alive,[lviii] and one could say that is merely a deplorable fact, but it has some reason. There are needs, demands, intellectual demands which are not satisfied by that.

Mr. Levy: So it is completeness which defines philosophy and distinguishes it from all other kinds of studies.

LS: Yes. Comprehensiveness, I would say, but equally important is the depth, how deeply you go in analyzing things. There is a kind of comprehensiveness which some very clever globetrotters have, like those who have seen the minds and laws of many lands and are under the spell of the prejudices which they sucked in with their mother's milk. So there is very great variety and there can be something good about that—a high-class journalism I highly respect. That is not philosophy. What you need in addition is analysis and the bringing out of the reasons why these things are, and that is not possible today, at any rate, without a certain *kind* of historical studies. I don't say historical studies simply, because historical studies can be unenlightening and merely antiquarian and irrelevant. And even if people speak of history of ideas, that can be very unenlightening, a kind of exciting panorama of the variety of opinions which men held in

[lviii] Thomas Hill Green (1836–1882), British Hegelian philosopher and political liberal. His major works were lectures on political obligation delivered in Oxford in 1979 (published as *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, and *Prolegomena to Ethics* (1883).

different times without at any moment being concerned with the question: Which are the true ideas? You would have to say: A philosophically-inspired history. And then we come back again to: What is philosophy? And I must return to the very simple definition of philosophy which was suggested by both modern and ancient philosophers, and which is so simple that it might very well appear ridiculous: philosophy is the attempt to know the truth about all things. I think that is a fitting conclusion for this class. [Laughter]

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[1] Moved "the common people."
[2] Deleted "And this excludes."
[3] Changed from "the so-called aristocracy are those who"
[4] Deleted "And the citizen is."
[5] Deleted "a citizen."
[6] Deleted "or misleading? Because." Moved "or misleading."
[7] Deleted "if."
[8] Deleted "with."
[9] Deleted "it."
[10] Deleted "Mr, Bruell, will you allow me?"
[11] Deleted "as."
[12] Moved "today."
[13] Deleted "but."
[14] Deleted "this."
[15] Deleted "people, like."
[16] Deleted "charm."
[17] Deleted "as you will remember."
[20] Deleted "of."
[21] Deleted "but."
[22] Deleted "that."
[23] Deleted "are."
[24] Deleted "Green, you know."

Session 16: no date

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, books 6 and 4, Plato and Aristotle

Leo Strauss: [1]Today I would like to finish the discussion of Aristotle and if some time is left to say a few words about Plato's political philosophy in contradistinction to Aristotle's. Now we have spoken about Aristotle's political science [and][2] [its] chief theme, the variety of regimes. We haven't yet considered its basis. The basis, we can say and must say, is the end of man. The end of man consists according to Aristotle in the unimpeded practice of virtue, "unimpeded" meaning you must have certain equipment in order to do that. You must be healthy and not completely unsupplied with funds, because this would make it impossible for you to practice virtue in every respect. Now virtue means here primarily of course moral virtue. What moral virtue is, what kinds of moral virtue there are, is discussed in the first part of Aristotle's work concerning political philosophy, and that first part is known by the name of *Ethics*. There you find a detailed discussion of virtue in general, and of the various kinds of virtues—especially, as they are mentioned,[i] moral virtues. This term, ["moral virtues"], has been coined by Aristotle. [3] Now virtue belongs somehow with morality, therefore, and also with the moral law, as it later was called, which was also more or less identical with the natural law. "Natural law" is a term of Greek extraction; "moral law," as far as I know, is of Christian theological origin and was originally used for designating a part of the old law, of the Old Testament law. This only in passing. There is no natural law in Aristotle. Aristotle does mention the term in his *Rhetoric*, but his *Rhetoric* does not present Aristotle's own views but the view which an orator has to use, and in particular which a forensic orator has to use.

I propose that we have a look at Aristotle's statement on this subject, which is truly Aristotle, i.e., which he does not report from popular opinion, but which he speaks in his own name. That is in the fifth book of the *Ethics*, page 294 in the Loeb edition.[ii]

"Political Justice is of two kinds, one natural, the other conventional. A rule of justice is natural that has the same validity everywhere, and does not depend on our accepting it or not. A rule is conventional that in the first instance may be settled in one way or the other indifferently, though having once been settled it is not indifferent: for example, that the ransom for a prisoner shall be a mina, that a sacrifice shall consist of a goat and not of two sheep; and any regulations for particular cases, for instance the sacrifice enacted in honor of Brasidas, and ordinances in the nature of special decrees. Some people think that all rules of justice are merely conventional, because whereas what is by nature is immutable and has the same validity everywhere, as fire burns both here and in Persia, rules of justice are seen to vary. That rules of justice vary is not absolutely true, but only with qualifications. Among the gods indeed it is perhaps not true at all; but in our world, although there is such a thing as natural justice ["the just by nature"'—LS] all rules of

[i] It is possible that Strauss said or meant "as we have mentioned" or "as they are called."
[ii] *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939).

justice are variable. But nevertheless there is such a thing as natural justice as well as justice not by nature;[iii] and it is easy to see which rules of justice, though not absolute, are natural, and which are not natural but legal and conventional, both sorts alike being variable. The same distinction will hold good in all other matters; for instance, the right hand is naturally stronger than the left, yet it should be possible for any man to make himself ambidextrous.

"The rules of justice based on convention and expediency are alike standard measures. Corn and wine measures are not equal in all places, but are larger in wholesale and smaller in retail markets. Similarly the rules of justice ordained not by nature but by man are not the same in all places, since forms of government are not the same, though in all places there is only one form of government that is natural, namely, the best form."

LS: Well, "which is by nature the best." Now this is the single page which Aristotle devotes to that great subject of the ages, natural right. Now what does he mean by that? You see, there is no clear example given of natural right, we only have to figure it out. For example, when he says to sacrifice a goat but not two sheep, this is conventional. But what about sacrificing in general? Perhaps he means this is by nature right, worship of the gods. And similarly, to ransom prisoners for this and this amount is conventional, but that you should ransom prisoners or, more generally stated, that you should help fellow-citizens who in the course of civic duty have come into trouble, this is by nature valid. Helping citizens out of misfortune into which they have fallen as a consequence of performing a civic duty, and worshipping the gods, this is by nature right. We would then have to say as a general definition: the natural right is that right by which every city stands or falls. You see here, at the beginning of the passage read, natural right is declared to be a part of political right. That does not necessarily mean that there are no natural-right relations between individuals as distinguished from citizens, say, between complete foreigners who meet somewhere in a forest. Aristotle would think that there are relations of right not established by human convention between any human beings. But what he has in mind is that only among fellow-citizens, and only grown-up fellow-citizens, for that matter,[4] do relations of right acquire their full density. For example, within the family, relations of right do not acquire their full density because children ordinarily have property rights among themselves or against their parents, and so on. But if the people are fellow-citizens independent of each other, there you have the fullest density.

Now to come back to the examples to which Aristotle seems to allude: if it is correct that natural right is that right by which every city stands or falls, then we would have to say natural right is the flooring, the minimum condition. This seems to be confirmed by the example of the right-handed and [the] ambidextrous man. All men are by nature right-handed, but we can acquire ambidexterity by training. Now if we assume that Aristotle thinks that ambidexterity is preferable to right-handedness, is a greater perfection of the

[iii] These words were taken from Rackham and added to the transcript: "all rules of justice are variable. But nevertheless there is such a thing as natural justice as well as justice not by nature." Rackham in fact ends this selection with the words "justice not ordained by nature." *NE* 5.1034b18–1135a5.

man, then it would mean this: that natural right plus conventional right is higher than mere natural right, or that intelligent conventional right is higher than mere natural right. Now if this is so, then natural right is indifferent to the difference of regimes. Whether it is a democracy [or] an oligarchy, in all cases these conditions would have to be fulfilled. Positive right of course is relative to the regime: it is either democratic or oligarchic, etc. Yet, and that is a conclusion, one regime alone is by nature best everywhere: this is by nature, not by any human establishment. This regime (the most divine regime, as Aristotle says elsewhere)[iv] is full kingship, as we have seen. But this full kingship is the only regime which does not require any laws, where the superior man rules by looking at each case and its requirements. So we would have to say [that] the minimum condition and the maximum, the flooring and the ceiling, are natural and do not in any way depend on *nomos*, on law.

Yet—we have not yet considered the key passage—all just things, whether they are conventional or natural, are changeable. Thomas Aquinas's explanation is: This is not literally true; it applies only to the conclusion from the principles. The principles themselves are unchangeable. Aristotle himself does not make this distinction. Now how can this be understood? What Aristotle literally says is that there is no single rule of justice, natural or positive, which is not open to qualification, just qualification. Now we have seen in the *Politics*, for instance, the case of ostracism: that a man is banished, not for any crime he has committed, but for his very virtues and excellence. Why? Because his excellences threaten the normal course of events, especially in the case of a democracy. We have also seen the case of slavery, where Aristotle lays down the clear rule: no one shall be a slave who is not by nature a slave, and then later on, when he discusses slavery in the context of his best regime, he suggests that slaves be given the prospect of emancipation, which would be wholly impossible in the case of natural slaves—i.e., he takes it for granted that this best regime would have [un]natural slaves. The answer would be that some infraction of justice in one way or another may be required, even of natural justice.

I referred to the difference between Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle regarding natural right in this particular passage here. Some of you may be interested in a recent discussion of which I became aware. There was a symposium at Wellesley at which Mr. Pegis of the Pontifical Institute of Toronto read a very interesting paper about the Thomistic doctrine of natural law, asserting that this doctrine is not a philosophic teaching but a theological teaching—I believe an interpretation which is not in accordance with the traditional view—and I was told there was a certain excitement about it, though I couldn't be present at the lecture.[v] Still, it is worthy of serious consideration. Professor Pegis did not answer the question: What is Thomas Aquinas's philosophic view of natural right? which I would have liked to hear. That is, the mere fact that the teaching that is found in the *Summa* is *not* philosophic but theologic does not answer that question.

This much about the question of natural right in Aristotle. Let us now broaden the question. The principles of human action, according to Aristotle, or the noble things, as

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[iv] *Politics* 4.1289a40.

[v] This paper was apparently never published, and no reference to it has been found.

Aristotle puts it—what is their cognitive status? Let us now turn to the *Ethics*,[5] 1139b14-18 (Loeb edition, page 331).

"Let us now discuss these matters afresh,[vi] going more deeply into the matter. [He means now the intellectual virtues—LS]

"Let it be assumed that there are five qualities through which the mind achieves truth in affirmation or denial, namely, art or technical skill, scientific knowledge, prudence, wisdom, and intelligence. Conception and opinion are capable of error."[vii]

Let us stop here. Now none of these, with the exception of the central one, prudence, can have any relevance for ethics. Let us turn to page 337, where he speaks about practical wisdom or prudence particularly.

"We may arrive at a definition of prudence by considering who are the persons whom we call prudent. Now it is held to be the mark of a prudent man to be able to deliberate well about what is good and advantageous for himself, not in some one department, for instance what is good for his health or strength, but what is advantageous as a means to the good life in general."[viii]

The implication is this: regarding all parts of your welfare or well-being (or most of the parts), you have experts, but regarding your well-being and happiness as a whole, there are no experts. That everyone must do for himself. Now there are people who cannot take care of their well-being as a whole. Must they be sent to experts? Well, we always have such people around—I have forgotten the delicate and euphemistic term used, which is quite common. But think simply of children. Children cannot take care of their well-being as a whole: they have parents. Therefore a mature human being, if he is not truly (what is the term they use?) moronic, more or less must be able to take care of himself. That cannot be left to any experts. There is no expertise regarding ethics.

"This is proved by the fact that we speak of people as prudent or wise in some particular thing, when they calculate well with a view to attaining some particular end of value (other than those ends which are the object of an art); so that the prudent man in general will be the man who is good at deliberating in general.

"But no one deliberates about things that cannot vary, nor about things not within his power to do. Hence inasmuch as scientific knowledge involves demonstration, whereas things whose fundamental principles are variable are not capable of demonstration, because everything about them is variable, and inasmuch as one cannot deliberate about things that are of necessity, it follows that prudence is not the same as science. Nor can it be the same as art."

[vi] "Let us then discuss these virtues afresh," in Rackham.
[vii] *NE* 6.1139b14–18.
[viii] *NE* 6.1140a24–28.

LS: Art in the sense here is not fine art, of course, but a skill, such as carpentry or any other production.

"It is not science, because matters of conduct admit of variation; and not art, because doing and making are generically different, since making aims at an end distinct from the act of making, whereas in doing the end cannot be other than the act itself: doing well is in itself the end."[ix]

This is the formal definition of prudence or practical wisdom given by Aristotle. But this is obviously not sufficient. Let us turn to page 367.

"But we must go a little deeper into the objection that prudence does not render men more capable of performing noble and just actions. Let us start with the following consideration. As some people, we maintain, perform just acts and yet are not just men (for instance, those who do what the law enjoins but do it unwillingly, or in ignorance, or for some ulterior object—"

LS: Does this make sense, this simple thing, that someone may do the right thing for the wrong reason? I think you all know that a man may act nobly[6] on the basis of very low calculation; then of course he does not act nobly, he is good only externally. So it all depends on the choice, on the intention, as one would say—

"and not for the sake of the actions themselves, although they are as a matter of fact doing what they ought to do and all that a good man should), on the other hand, it appears, there is a state of mind in which a man may do these various acts with the result that he really is a good man: I mean when he does them from choice, and for the sake of the acts themselves. Now rightness in our choice of an end is secured by virtue; but to do the acts that must in the nature of things be done in order to attain the end we have chosen, is not a matter for virtue but for a different faculty.

"We must dwell on this point to make it clearer. There is a certain faculty called cleverness, which is the capacity for doing the things aforesaid that conduce to the aim we propose, and so attaining that aim. If the aim is noble this is a praiseworthy faculty; if base, it is mere knavery; this is how we come to speak of both prudent men and mere knaves as clever. Now this faculty is not identical with prudence, but prudence implies it. But that eye of the soul of which we spoke cannot acquire the quality of prudence without possessing virtue. This we have said before, and it is manifestly true. For deductive inferences about matters of conduct always have a major premise of the form "Since the end of supreme good is so and so" (whatever it may be, since we may take it as anything we like for the sake of the argument); but the supreme good only appears good to the good man: vice perverts the mind and causes it to hold false views about the first principles of conduct. Hence it is clear that we cannot be prudent without being good."[x]

[ix] *NE* 6.1140a28–1140b7.
[x] *NE* 6.1144a11–b1.

Now what Aristotle has in mind can be illustrated by the result of Socrates's argument in the first book of the *Republic*, where he reaches the conclusion that the guardian or keeper is the same as the thief, namely, what they have to know is exactly the same.[xi] How can you be a good thief if you do not know how to open these doors and where are the things you want to get out? And to be a good keeper you have to know this. So the intellectual element is the same. And the first reaction, I think, of every reader of the *Republic* to this particular argument would be that Socrates abstracts in a strange way from the moral intention, which of course is entirely different on the part of the thief on the one hand, and of the honest keeper on the other. But then the question arises: What is that honest intention?

Now Aristotle drives the argument somewhat deeper and says, partly agreeing with Socrates, [that] the intellectual element is more than this kind of knowledge which the thief and the guardian possess. In the case of the honest man, the intellectual virtue which he needs is necessarily tinged by virtue, whereas in the dishonest man it is not tinged by virtue. And this he draws out but obviously it is a distinction between a merely clever man and a prudent man. The prudent man, the practically wise man, is one whose intellectual faculty regarding practical matters is tinged by virtue, whereas that of the merely clever man is not. But this leads to a further question: How does he get his virtue? The practical wisdom, the prudence itself, only enables him to define or to find out what he should do in the circumstances. But how come he will only make decent choices in the circumstances? This is not yet guaranteed by prudence.

Now let us take a simple example: Someone needs money. There are *n* ways of getting money, some decent and honest, some dishonest. Now the prudent man excludes the dishonest ones as a matter of course, whereas a crook considers them also and makes his pick. He might in a given situation choose the honest way because it is the most convenient for him, but nevertheless that is not because it is honest. How[7] does the prudent or decent man know *that for the sake of which* he chooses this particular honest action in preference to another honest way of action? How does he know the end? Now Aristotle has said here that the choice, the intention, becomes correct *through virtue*, meaning moral virtue, whereas prudence deals only with the ends, meaning what action now, in order to get money. But on the premise that it must be an honest one, how does he get the end? The general answer from Aristotle can be said to be this: How do we become good, if we are not good? Answer: By upbringing, by breeding, by being told from childhood: "Do that" and "Don't do that" and acting on it. Perhaps because we are spanked or given candies, as the case may be, but gradually it becomes a habit so that we cannot well act otherwise. Very well, this is good: by breeding. But how can we distinguish between sound and perverse breeding? After all, it is thinkable that a child is brought up very severely with many "dos" and "don'ts," and yet they are, not necessarily immoral, but somewhat perverse. How does practical reason get its highest or ultimate principles? That is one of the most difficult questions in Aristotle.

Now in order to understand that, I would like to give you an example. Almost any will do, but I somehow feel that the one which I suggest is the most practical. In Aristotle's

[xi] *Republic* 333e–334b.

Ethics, in his discussion of the individual virtues there are two peaks, two virtues which comprise in different ways all other virtues, and they are magnanimity and justice. Justice comprises all virtues from the point of view of our relation to other human beings. Magnanimity comprises all virtues from the point of view of our self-perfection. Now let us have a look at the section on magnanimity. That is in the Loeb on page 213.

"Greatness of soul [that is a more Anglo-Saxon translation of "magnanimity"[8]—LS] as the word itself implies, seems to be related to great objects; let us first ascertain what sort of objects these are. It will make no difference whether we examine the quality itself or the person that displays the quality. [In other words, whether we look at magnanimity or the magnanimous man, the practical result is the same—LS]

"Now a person is thought to be great-souled if he claims much and deserves much; he who claims much without deserving it is foolish, but no one of moral excellence is foolish or senseless. The great-souled man is then as we have described. He who deserves little and claims little is modest or temperate, but not great-souled, since to be great-souled involves greatness just as handsomeness involves size: small people may be neat and well-made, but not handsome. He that claims much but does not deserve much is vain; though not everybody who claims more than he deserves is vain. He that claims less than he deserves is small-souled, whether his deserts be great or only moderate, or even though he deserves little, if he claims still less. The most small-souled of all would seem to be the man who claims less than he deserves when his deserts are great; for what would he have done had he not deserved so much?

"Though therefore in regard to the greatness of his claim the great-souled man is an extreme, by reason of its rightness he stands at the mean point, for he claims what he deserves [this remark about the extreme is known to every one of you from the Cow Palace in San Francisco—LS][xii] while the vain and the small-souled err by excess and defect respectively.

"If then the great-souled man claims and is worthy of great things and most of all the greatest things, greatness of soul must be concerned with some one object especially. "Worthy" is a term of relation: it denotes having a claim to goods external to oneself. Now the greatest external good we should assume to be the thing which we offer as a tribute to the gods, and which is most coveted by men of high station, and is the prize awarded for the noblest deeds; and such a thing is honor, for honor is clearly the greatest of external goods. Therefore the great-souled man is he who has the right disposition in relation to honors and disgraces. And even without argument it is evident that honor is the object with which the great-souled are concerned."[xiii]

LS: We cannot read the whole thing. Let us now turn to 1125a1.

[xii] "Cow Palace": another reference to Senator Goldwater's speech at the 1964 Republican National Convention.
[xiii] *NE* 4.1123a34–b23.

"He will be incapable of living at the will of another, unless a friend, since to do so is slavish, and hence flatterers are always servile, and humble people flatterers. He is not prone to admiration, since nothing is great to him. He does not bear a grudge, for it is not a mark of greatness to recall things against people, especially the wrongs they have done you, but rather to overlook them. He is no gossip; for he will not talk either about himself or about another, as he neither wants to receive compliments, nor to hear other people run down (nor is he lavish of praise either); and so he is not given to speaking evil himself, even of his enemies, except when he intends to give offence deliberately [literally, "except if by insolence—LS]. In troubles that cannot be avoided, or trifling mishaps, he will never cry out nor ask for help, since to do so would imply that he took them to heart. He likes owning beautiful and useless things, rather than useful things, that bring in return, since the former show his independence more. Other traits generally attributed to the great-souled man, are a slow gait, a deep voice, and a deliberate utterance; to speak in shrill tones and walk fast denotes an excitable and nervous temperament, which does not belong to one who cares for few things and thinks nothing good."[xiv]

LS: Yes. How does Aristotle know what he tells us about the great-souled man?[9] I think we would recognize it, but this is not quite sufficient. There is a story of Napoleon, that he never acquired that gait which the noble men of ancient times had; he always walked too fast, as if he were at the head of a platoon. Now why Aristotle says here his motions are thought to be slow, and his voice deep—who makes these suppositions? . . . They are *made*—by people, by people who know. I mean, there are people who don't see a difference between the great-souled man and others, but they are incompetent, just as people talking about colors who do not know colors are incompetent regarding colors. But some of these things are verging on the silly, others not; they all are known by opinion, by *doxa*. This is empirically so—no demonstration, no deduction.

Now[10] compare that with the procedure of Plato, in the *Republic* especially.[xv] Plato singles out four virtues there: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. Then Plato tries to prove to you that there are these four and only these four virtues. The proof is that the soul is such that it has a desiring part, the virtue of which is called temperance; another part is called spiritedness, the virtue of which is courage, controlled spiritedness; and then there is wisdom, controlled reason, educated reason; and justice is needed in order to keep them together in one way or another. So Plato gives us a rational account of virtue. Aristotle does not refer to that. You remember the deduction of the six regimes which he gave us in book 3, and he showed us there can be these three and only these three regimes, although there may be mixtures. He does nothing of the kind in the *Ethics*. Now[11] how can we understand that? Because we have the natural and legitimate desire to see how these virtues are connected, what their bases are, or simply how they are deduced from higher principles. If you read the discussion of the virtues in Thomas's *Summa Theologica*, you will see that there is such a deduction there, but Thomas uses also the material supplied by the Stoic writers and other ancient writers, that is to say, by a school that is much closer in certain respects to Plato than to Aristotle.[xvi] Aristotle does

[xv] *Republic* 427d–444e.
[xv] *Republic* 427d–444e.
[xvi] Possibly a reference to *ST* 1-2ae, q94 a1–3.

not do that. But we must nevertheless address this question to Aristotle, whether he satisfies it or not, that is: How do you know this? Or if you can know this, you must tell us why. Now as we learn from other writings of Aristotle, practical reason receives its most general principles from theoretical reason, ultimately from the end of man.[xvii] Therefore, we have to know the principle from which we would start in any deductive procedure: the moral virtues are required for the end of man. Very good, but there is one great difficulty. If they are required for the end of man, are they not also choiceworthy for their own sake? And perhaps Aristotle does not want to deduce them, because a deduction would always mean a subordination. Aristotle never says that they are needed for the end of man.

In order to understand that we have to consider that for Aristotle *the* end of man is the theoretical life, the life of contemplation, the life of the philosopher. Does this highest end of man require the moral virtues? Aristotle doesn't ever answer the question explicitly, but Thomas Aquinas does for him. He says prudence is the only intellectual virtue which is not possible without moral virtue, of course because it has to do with action, and our intellectual action must be tinged by morality, otherwise we will be knaves, or crooks. But wisdom, theoretical wisdom proper, does not require moral virtue, Thomas suggests.[xviii] But is this not wholly unintelligible? Does not the pursuit of knowledge require, for example, courage, as we speak of intellectual courage? Sobriety? I mean, a drunk is not likely to make great progress in finding the truth. Furthermore, does not the theoretical man have to live in society, and therefore the social virtues like justice are necessary? Obviously! But the question is, how do these virtues appear from the point of view of theoretical wisdom, which is the end? They appear only as means.

This view has been stated in a very powerful way in modern times by Nietzsche, in the third part of his *Genealogy of Morals*. There he says: Of course the philosophers are moral people, but the morality doesn't mean what it means ordinarily. A man is moral just like a jockey is very ascetic: in order to win the next race. In other words, it is merely for the end. So the theoretical life as the highest end makes intelligible that there are the moral virtues, but it does not make intelligible why they should be choiceworthy for their own sake. Now fortunately, *theōria*, contemplation, is not the only end of man. The other great end of man by nature is social life; and social life also needs the moral virtues. Take Hobbes: the virtues are conditions of peacefully living together. Again you can take almost any example, say, that of the habitual drunk, whose unpeaceable and noisy conduct toward his fellows makes it perfectly clear that some self-restraint is necessary. And the same is true of the other moral virtues.

If we view the virtues in the light of society as the end, we arrive at a very well-known doctrine, much-quoted and well-known, the utilitarian understanding of morality: virtue is required for living together. But here we see also in the utilitarian doctrine that the moral virtues are understood as means for something, not as choiceworthy for their own sake. Now we have this great difficulty: if morality or virtue is required only as a means

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[xvii] From *City and Man* 26n, it appears that Strauss here has in mind *De anima* 434a16–21 and 432b27–30.

[xviii] See *ST* 1–2ae, q58 a5.

for the common good, and [(if we do not want to argue circularly)] the common good is here[12] defined in [non-]moral terms—the common good then means something like peace, wealth, freedom—it is then at least possible that under certain circumstances, the moral vices may be conducive to that common good. Machiavelli's point. Now if so, it appears that the moral virtues cannot be understood as being for the sake of the common good, nor for the sake of the city.

These positions have a point, but they are not sufficient. The only way to proceed,[13] in order especially to avoid Machiavellianism, is to understand the city as being for the sake of the practice of moral virtue, and this is surely what Aristotle does. So in other words, the city is for the sake of moral virtue, but moral virtue is itself also for the sake of something higher: *theōria*, philosophy. But if we disregard the philosophers entirely, then we see that moral virtue is irreducible to any other end than itself, and that is what decent men ordinarily say, that decency is choiceworthy for its own sake.[14] To use colloquial terms now in use, moral virtue appears to us as empirically absolute. And that is represented, reproduced in Aristotle's presentation of the *Ethics*. We can say, using a non-Aristotelian *theōria*, moral virtue or its implications have the character of an unwritten *nomos*, which is understood by gentlemen or tolerably decent men everywhere, in Greece or in China or wherever you look, and yet which is irreducible—not because it is strictly speaking absolute, as it is according to Kant in modern times, but because moral virtue is as it were situated at the point where the requirements of the two fundamental ends of man, theoretical life and society, meet. Not the ends themselves, but their requirements.

And this is, one can say, the mystery of Aristotle's point of view. In fact, moral virtue derives its dignity from the fact that it points beyond the vulgar goals, toward man's highest end. Moral virtue is ultimately, from the philosopher's point of view, a reflection of philosophy. The gentleman, the *kalos k'agathos* in Greek, points toward the philosopher, but he is not a philosopher and he is lower than a philosopher, from Aristotle's point of view. And his pointing toward the philosopher is not therefore without ambiguity. To mention only one: the craftsman or artisan, who by definition is not a philosopher, is in one sense closer to the philosopher than the gentleman, [for] a very simple reason. A gentleman cannot be petty, he cannot count every penny; it is impossible. The craftsman, [however], has to be *exact*. Look at a carpenter or a shoemaker: this kind of quality which the craftsman has and the gentleman despises shows a certain affinity,[15] a certain kinship between the craftsman and the philosopher. The picture is not of course as simple as it appears from a strictly political presentation of the issue. Now the clearest statement which we find of this whole state of affairs occurs at the end of the other *Ethics* of Aristotle, the so-called *Eudemian Ethics*, from a man called Eudemus, probably Aristotle's son. There, towards the end, we find a discussion of two kinds of goodness, a gentleman's goodness and a non-gentleman's goodness. I can only encourage you to read that with some care. I think the solution is as I have suggested. In the Loeb it is on pages 469 following.

Now with this I conclude my remarks about Aristotle on the basis of Aristotle's *Politics*. This political philosophy is ultimately unintelligible without an understanding of what the

contemplative ideal, as it is called, means. One can say the highest theme of Aristotle's political science is philosophy as a way of life, and this was always so in classical times, in Plato as well as in Cicero, and one of the most striking differences between modern political philosophy and classical political philosophy is that philosophy as a way of life has disappeared from modern political philosophy. Of course, a political scientist or a social scientist today still speaks of philosophy, or has other names for it, as parts of culture which are of great interest to the social scientist, but that is not quite the same thing.

Is there any point you would like to bring up in connection with this question of the foundations? Or perhaps I will continue my exposition, and then we will have a free-for-all at the end of the meeting. The clever ones among you may wish to get some inkling of what will happen next time. Yes?

Student: A while ago you pointed to the danger of circularity in saying that on the one hand, virtue is the means to the city, and on the other, the end of the city is moral virtue. Now, did we really get around that by saying that while moral virtue is conducive to the ends of the city, the end of the city is the same thing? Don't we have to ask the original question: How does Aristotle know what moral virtue is, is for itself?

LS: Well, could one not assume, to take care of the circularity, the city is for the sake of moral virtue, and moral virtue finds its ultimate justification in the theoretical life?

Student: One would hope the justification would be in the theoretical life; but what about the other justification, that it is for itself?

LS: Well, but let us assume someone has no understanding, has no taste for the philosophic life. What would be the highest for him?

Student: The highest would be moral virtue, to be really good himself.

LS: Yes, that is the point which Kant makes, that moral virtue is the highest. We all can understand that, although it is not equally well understood by all people at all times. That is a peculiar heritage from the age of Enlightenment, that it seemed to be so clear that the only thing which we can rightfully expect from a man, and for which we can rightfully respect a man, is his honesty. And I think a liberal society at its best is based on this principle: not simply on freedom, but also on the fact that only probity and decency are to be respected.

Well, then, I will turn to the other great teacher of political philosophy—[xix] —but as for questions regarding Aristotle's *Politics*, I remind you of what I said about the end of the third book, and other difficulties of that kind. But they are not comparable in magnitude to those you find in Plato.

[xix] The tape was changed at this point.

In the nineteenth century an approach towards Plato emerged, and not only towards Plato, which still predominates, which we can call the historical approach. "Historical" means here "genetic," and in a twofold way. First, we have to see Plato (and the same would of course be true of Aristotle) as in one way or another an outgrowth of Greek life, of Greek life and society and understanding, or of *Greekness*, you can say. And the second is we have to study Plato's thought in its own genesis, Plato's development. And there are certain views which we might find, I believe, in every book on Plato as far as I remember: there is an early period, there is a middle period, and there is a late period; and we know exactly what Plato thought, if not in every year, in each of these periods and how they developed from each other. I must say, in honor of a former professor of the University of Chicago, Paul Shorey, that he was the only one who opposed this view at the time when it was strongest. He wrote among other things a book called *The Unity of Plato's Thought*, in which he tried to show that Plato never changed his mind.[xx] I think I would agree with Shorey's thesis, only sometimes he makes things a bit easy for himself. In other words, he doesn't see that there are certain great difficulties that he cannot resolve. I do not believe that they can be solved by the way that the men who opposed Shorey thought to solve them, by thinking Plato only changed his mind, but the difficulties are there.

Now a special point of course is that among the dialogues that have come down to us as Platonic, quite a few are declared to be spurious, not written by Plato. As far as I can judge, this kind of declaration in all cases is based on a kind of presumed knowledge of what Plato could have written—"this he could not have written"—or that they believe they have exhausted Plato's possibilities. There is one little dialogue called *Menexenus*, which is regarded as genuine and is *only* protected by a quotation in Aristotle. Without that, these people would have declared the *Menexenus* to be spurious because it is of a certain levity which is wholly unbecoming to [these severe men, Plato or else Socrates][16].

Now the reason why this approach is so powerful is ultimately an insufficient reflection on the form of Plato's work, on the simple fact that Plato did not write treatises as Aristotle did, but dialogues. He also wrote letters, but apart from the fact that some people say the thirteen letters are spurious (at least most of them), letters are also not treatises, of course. There is one letter which is particularly famous, the Seventh Letter, the longest one, which contains a kind of autobiography of Plato, and is frequently used in interpretations of Plato's political philosophy. But let us forget about the letters, and let us speak only about the dialogues. Now what is the consequence of the fact that Plato wrote dialogues? Very simple: that we never hear Plato speaking. Plato could have made himself a character in the dialogues, it is true; but that he did not do.

Since Plato never speaks, we cannot find Plato's views in any utterances occurring in the dialogues. The dialogues are in this way like dramas. Now when, for example, in Goethe's *Faust*, Faust replaces the words at the beginning of the Gospel of St. John, "In the beginning was the word" by "In the beginning was the deed," we cannot say that was Goethe's view.[xxi] What we see is Faust's view. And so strictly speaking we never know

[xx] Paul Shorey, *The Unity of Plato's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1903).
[xxi] *Faust*, lines 1224–1237.

what Plato thinks. But the solution to this difficulty is very simple: every child knows that Plato has one spokesman, his revered master Socrates, and hence what Socrates says has Plato's imprimatur, as it were. I would raise the question: How do you know? That is a long question. But even granting[17] that Socrates is the spokesman of Plato, we are confronted by the fact that one of Socrates's characteristics is his irony. Now to have a spokesman who is ironical, that is almost as bad as to have no spokesman at all. Of course we have to raise the question, what is irony? And we cannot take any modern, especially romantic, view of irony. Literally translated, it means dissimulation. But a dissimulation gradually comes to mean a dissimulation of a certain kind: noble dissimulation. If someone dissembles his defects, then he is not an ironical man; but if he dissembles his excellences, then he is an ironical man. And it is clear why someone could dissemble his excellences simply in order to spare the sensitivities of other men: that is a noble effort. More generally, irony is such dissimulation as is practiced in the interests of other men, of interlocutors, at least as much as in the interests of the speaker. One can say irony[18] in the Socratic sense means a kind of serpentine wisdom with the innocence of doves. If it were only serpentine, it wouldn't be noble, but this [is a] peculiar combination of simplicity and complexity.

The comparison of Socrates with Jesus which this remark implies is of course very old and very plausible at first glance. Very famous is the[19] [statement] of Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Sancte Socrate Ora Pro Nobis*, treating Socrates as a saint.[xxii] But the difference between Socrates and Jesus is more or less important. And I will read you now a true Christian saint, namely Sir Thomas More, the author of *Utopia*, which shows that he was a very good knower of Plato's *Republic*. But this work, called *Of Comfort against Tribulation*, he wrote in prison shortly before his execution. You know his fate. Here he says somewhere: "To prove that this life is no laughing time, but rather a time of weeping, we find that our Savior himself wept twice or thrice; but never find we that he laughed so much as once." And now the great laugher Thomas More adds: "I will not swear that he never did; but in the leastwise he left us no example of it. But on the other side, he left us example of weeping."[xxiii] Exactly the opposite is true of Socrates. When you go over the writings of Plato or Xenophon, you will never find Socrates weeping. You find him, however, laughing twice or thrice, and this is an indication of a fundamental difference. We can say there is a slightly greater kinship of the Platonic dialogue with comedy than with tragedy. We cannot call it comedy, surely not, but there is a slightly greater kinship with comedy than with tragedy.

Irony means, to state it somewhat differently, to speak with a view to someone, speaking differently to different kinds of people. And all Socratic utterances are in this sense ironical. If we want to understand these utterances properly, we have to consider the people to whom he speaks, the time, the place, the moral and intellectual qualities of the people with Socrates. We always have to be able to translate, as it were, the statements made, say, toward Crito in the *Crito*, with what Socrates might say to Plato. We can say

[xxii] "Sancte Socrate Ora Pro Nobis" was a marginal addition to the *Convivium Religiosum* (first printed in the July–August 1522 edition), *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), v. 39–40, 233.
[xxiii] More, *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, chap. 13.

the understanding of a Platonic dialogue consists in transforming something in two dimensions—that is, a plane—into something which is three-dimensional, which requires an effort on our part to discover. We must consider not only what Socrates says but how he says it: not his voice or intonation, but when he spoke, to whom he spoke, and under what circumstances. I mention another point only in passing, a very important difference: that some Platonic dialogues look like dramas. At the beginning you find the characters enumerated and then it begins. And there are also narrated dialogues, which have the form, "and then I asked him" and so forth. But here the great question arises: Why is the *Republic*, for example, a narrated dialogue, and the *Gorgias* a performed dialogue? These questions are as important for the understanding of a Platonic dialogue as the understanding of an actual discussion. I think all errors of interpretation are based on this crucial fact. You see, it is much more difficult to understand a Platonic dialogue, however simple and early it is, than Aristotle's *Politics*.

Now we find at the entrance of Plato's work—not literally, but with qualifications—the *Apology of Socrates* and the *Crito*. I will discuss this as an example. Some people say that in the *Apology* you see Socrates as a rebel who stands up for freedom of speech, or whatever it may be, whereas in the *Crito* we see Socrates the lawabiding citizen. And therefore we find, on the lower level of interpretation, two schools of thought: the revolutionaries, who like the *Apology*, and the conservatives, who prefer the *Crito*. Needless to say, this is an arbitrary selection: both things are Socrates. This tension, between Socrates the lawabiding citizen and Socrates the rebel, is Socrates. By understanding that tension, one has made considerable progress toward [the] understanding of Socrates. Socrates is neither simply the rebel nor simply lawabiding. It is perfectly clear from the *Apology* itself that he would not obey a law that is manifestly unjust. What about the law which condemns him to die? He obeys it. Is it a just law? Is he justly condemned? One of his younger friends, the most enthusiastic but not the most intelligent among them, is a young man called Apollodorus, and he told Socrates after he was condemned to death: "How terrible that you have been condemned to death, unjustly!" Whereupon Socrates said: "Would you like it better if I had been justly condemned?" This is one of the very rare occasions where it is explicitly said that Socrates laughed.[xxiv]

Now to speak more particularly about the *Crito*: Of this famous statement demanding absolute lawabidingness without any qualification, that is, with this qualification: that if you have the right to emigrate with your property and you have not availed yourself of that right, then you are obliged to obey the laws. By your staying there, you have made a kind of tacit contract to obey them. Now this leads to all kinds of interesting questions. Let us assume the only property you have is landed, which you cannot well take with you, or you may not be able to sell it, what are you to do then? In this dialogue, *Crito* is afraid of what people will say about *him* if his friend Socrates is executed. And this is particularly grave because he is a very wealthy man, and it was apparently a matter of course that by prudent application of bribes you could get a man out of jail in Athens. Now what Socrates actually does in the dialogue is to supply Crito with a defense of Crito . . . what Crito can say to the people who accuse him of not trying to help his old

[xxiv] This occurs not in Plato but in Xenophon's *Apology of Socrates*, 28.

friend Socrates, who has been so helpful to him. In other words, what Socrates presents here fits Crito and his accusers, whether it would fit man on a higher level needs investigation. As for the *Apology of Socrates*, we have some direct clue in Plato's dialogue called *Gorgias*, where Socrates discusses his situation if he would be accused of a crime in Athens.[xxv] He makes it clear that if he were accused he would be in the position of a physician accused by a pastry cook before a tribunal of children. These children would say: You have taken away our pastries, our pleasures, or our toys, for that matter. And how could he possibly explain to these children that the bitter pills which he gave them, the bitter truths, are better than these sweets? The Athenians would be wholly unable to understand him, and therefore he must adapt what he tells them to their capacity. And that is the way in which one would have to study the *Apology*.

Now a few words about the most famous political work of Plato, the *Republic*. I heard that in this country it is sold much more than any other work of Plato. Now the *Republic* is distinguished from the *Apology* and the *Crito* and even from the *Gorgias* by one very obvious fact, appearing to the simple reader: a radical, extreme critique of democracy as such. In the *Gorgias* he criticizes certain democratic statesmen—Themistocles, Pericles, and so on—but here democracy as such is radically criticized. The context of course is the presentation of the best regime, of the truly just regime, and democracy is viewed in the light of that. Now this truly just regime is characterized by three institutions: absolute communism, communism regarding property, women, and children; equality of the two sexes; and rule of philosophers. And the reasoning justifying these institutions takes up a relatively short space, chiefly in the fifth book. But there is a kind of hidden reasoning which starts at the very beginning. The question is raised: What is justice? And the first answer given is: Justice consists in restoring property to its rightful owners. But there is an obvious difficulty here. Let us assume the property is a knife, and the owner is insane. Obviously justice does not consist in restoring his property to him; then only if such restoration is good for the owner. We must of course enlarge it, because there are actions of justice which have nothing to do with restoring of property. And then we would say, as the Western tradition does, justice consists in giving or leaving to everybody what belongs to him. But here we have the same difficulty. In giving or leaving to a man what belongs to him, if the individual concerned is a vicious playboy, it would be much better for him to be deprived of what he owns than for him to keep it. In other words, there is a conflict between justice understood as giving or leaving to everyone what belongs to him, and the other equally reasonable proposition that justice is good.

This difficulty has been stated very well by Plato's fellow student of Socrates, not to say friend, in his *Education of Cyrus* . . . a story which I have retold, I believe, in almost every class I have given.[xxvi] There was a big boy who had a small coat, and a small boy who had a big coat. And young Cyrus, future founder of the Persian Empire, was in a school of justice—because in Persia they have schools of justice, not of reading, writing, and arithmetic—and there he was asked: If the big boy took away the coat of the small boy and gave him the small coat, how would he judge the case? And he said: That is fine; now each one has what fits him. And then he was spanked: he was not requested to

[xxv] *Gorgias* 521e–522c.
[xxvi] Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 1.3.17.

decide what is fitting, but what is right in the sense of legal. But if we are concerned with justice pure and simple, not with secondary considerations, we have to find an order in which everyone gets what is good for him, and that means of course the abolition of private property: the very simple fact that men who now are well served by having a big estate under their control may tomorrow be wholly unfit for it means that there cannot be private property. And who is to do the assigning? Only competent men who are able to say what is good for whom, a kind of physicians of the soul. And that is the reason why there must be absolute rule of philosophers and why they must have common property.

Now regarding the rule of the philosopher, we find this very extreme statement in the center of the *Republic* more or less: that all evils will cease from the cities if the philosophers are kings.[xxvii] In the immediate context this means the philosophers' becoming kings is a necessary and sufficient condition. Incidentally, in the Seventh Letter this is also repeated, and in the Seventh Letter there is not even an allusion made to communism and the equality of the sexes. But even in the *Republic* I think that is clearly indicated. If the philosophers' becoming kings is the necessary and sufficient condition for the cessation of all evils, then there is no need for absolute communism or equality of the sexes. What is the basis of the demand for equality of the sexes in the *Republic*? The reasoning supporting that equality is that the difference between the two sexes is not more relevant than the difference between bald-headed and not-bald-headed men. I believe this is a very insufficient statement about the difference between the two sexes. The only difference is said to be a difference of strength. Granting that for one moment, would this not be very important for the military profession? And women are supposed to be soldiers in the same way as men, to say nothing of the importance of the difference between the two sexes for war altogether: that the loss of many men is much less dangerous for the future of the city than the loss of many women, because a small number of men can generate a large number of children and the same is obviously not true of women.

But to go back to this general statement, that all evils will cease if the philosophers are kings. This wonderful order will come about if, when the philosophers become kings, everyone older than ten will be expelled from the city. So the rule of the philosophers is only a primary condition. Then they will expel everyone older than ten and start almost from scratch. The question of course arises: Who will do the expelling? These one or two philosophers—well, there are the soldiers around, but the soldiers have not yet been educated. In other words, the best regime as presented in the *Republic* is impossible. Why then does Plato create the appearance of presenting to us the best regime? Cicero has said somewhere that what Plato does in the *Republic* is not to present the best regime but, in Latin, the *ratio rerum civilium*, the nature of political things.[xxviii] By making this extreme experiment, this impossibility, Plato lets us see why it is impossible and therewith what are the limits, the character, the nature of political things. One illustration: that is the famous noble lie, which Socrates demands be accepted by the city. The first half of it is that they all must believe that they have been brought up within the earth; in other words, that they all are simply children of the earth. And when speaking of them Socrates makes

[xxvii] *Republic* 473d–e, Seventh Letter 326a–b.
[xxviii] Cicero, *Republic* 2, para. 52.

a slight change: he replaces the word "earth" with the word "land"—territory, this particular part of the earth. The noble lie suggests that each political society is natural, whereas what is natural is only the unity of the human race, [20][as is] proven by the simple fact that generally speaking, a male human [being] from one society and a female human being from another can generate a human being. There is other evidence for this Platonic view (if it deserves [to] be called Platonic, because it is elementary) in other Platonic dialogues. This is the natural; this natural unity is not politically possible, however. And the political community must be ascribed a naturalness, a sacredness, which it cannot truly claim but which is necessary for its being a unity. The soldiers are to be like dogs, according to this. Dogs are, as we all know, nice to acquaintances and nasty to strangers. The famous fact [indicates] that here the *polis*, individual political society, is cut off from the other *political* societies, which are potential enemies, even if allies for the time being. And the joke here is quite obvious.[21] Socrates says here: Is this not the sign that the dog is a philosophic animal, because it distinguishes between good and bad people only on the basis of whether it knows them or not? Knowledge is its sole criterion: what a philosophic beast!

In a word, the *polis* as *polis* rests on opinion of questionable truth, and yet it is absolutely necessary. The *polis* is the cave. Leaving the cave is possible only for philosophers, i.e., a tiny minority of the human race. This is the *ratio rerum civilium*, the nature of political things, of which Cicero had spoken. And this of course is only an extremely brief summation of the subject matter of the *Republic*. I leave it at these remarks, and in a few minutes we can have discussion, if you like. Yes?

Mr. Levy: How can the naturally right regime be both the best regime and the floor? Either the floor can be improved on, one would think, or it is the best and every other regime is defective in some way. There is no floor, there is no minimum base, or everything must become a poor reflection of the best. That raises another question: How do we distinguish the absolutely barbarous from the moderately civilized?

LS: I beg your pardon? The last question.

Mr. Levy: How do we distinguish the absolutely barbarous, such as we see in modern times, from the moderately civilized?

LS: I believe one would say this is a question of the flooring: the barbarous or simply tyrannical regimes are those that do not respect the very flooring of civil life. But the fact that a society respects the flooring, i.e., has a minimum of decency, does not make a perfect society of it. It can be very imperfect.[22] One can say that the various regimes which Aristotle discusses, with the exception of tyranny, are as regimes above the flooring; [they] accept the flooring. They do not practice cannibalism, they do not habitually[23] exterminate human beings, and so on.

Mr. Levy: In other words, the mark above which is civilization and below which is barbarism. The best civilizations are the highest.

LS: Yes, the highest would be one, although this is not feasible, in which philosophy is the highest and is recognized by the city. That is not possible according to Plato, nor according to Aristotle. Therefore, the maximum you can have is a regime in which educated men, with a certain deference to philosophy, rule. An example was for them Pericles, educated in a way by Anaxagoras.[xxix] There would be others. Yes?

Student: I'm still unclear about the relationship of philosophy to the *polis*. On the one hand there seems to be a tension between them, and on the other the end of the best regime, and the best life, would be the life of philosophy. On the one hand public worship is the necessarily highest form of philosophy of which the city is capable, and on the other, since philosophy transcends the city, it is not essential to the city. Then when would philosophy and the city be in harmony with each other? Only in the best regime?

LS: That philosophy would be openly in control—well, theoretically, yes, only in the best regime as Plato described it. The question is whether that is feasible.

Same Student: I was referring to Aristotle.

LS: And then?

Same student: Well . . . when in the . . . when *would* philosophy be in harmony with the city? In Aristotle's scheme? And when would there be the tension between philosophy and the city? And what would be the cause of that tension?

LS: Well, you gave one very important example: there are the gods of the city. That is exactly the point. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle could not accept these gods and the stories regarding them. And the city according to their view necessarily makes such demands. And Plato has discussed it most clearly in the tenth book of the *Laws*. In the *Laws* there is officially no rule of philosophers, just a kind of very much improved Sparta. But then the question arises: Must the city not have gods? Of course. And here Plato experiments with a theology which is acceptable to philosophy, and to the extent to which there were such a theology acceptable to philosophers, there could be harmony.[xxx] In a way, what the Enlightenment tried to do[24]—a rational religion, a natural theology, as the sole demand which human society makes on everyone, including the philosophers—would be such a solution. Do you know something about these men of the Enlightenment? . . . No. In other words, my brief reply tells you something?

Same Student: Yes. Well, I was referring specifically to *Aristotle*. And you had mentioned that in listing the various requirements of the *polis*, one of them was public worship, and you had said that philosophy could be considered the highest form of public worship because it deals with things divine. Now this would seem to contradict the

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[xxix] Pericles is said to have learned something of the study of nature from the philosopher Anaxagoras in Plato's *Phaedrus* 270a.

[xxx] Strauss later pointed out the ambiguities in the law the Athenian Stranger proposes in *The Argument and the Action of Plato's "Laws"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 155–56.

statement that because philosophy transcends the city, it is therefore not essential to the city.

LS: This I do not see. The contradiction is this, which Aristotle expresses very clearly in the passages which I quoted: public worship is the fifth or first of the functions of the city. Now it would be the first, according to its intrinsic claim in the eyes of the city, but this claim is not as such recognized by Aristotle. There is a contradiction, but the contradiction is not one for which Aristotle or any other philosopher is responsible. The difficulty is this, that what Aristotle regards as the highest form of worship of the gods is not recognized as such by the city. Aristotle may call the ruling intelligence "Zeus," condescending to what the people say, but this is of course not what they *mean*. And in the moment this becomes clear, then he will be in for trouble. Something like this happened to Socrates.[25] The clearest discussion of how to avoid the tension of which I am aware is the tenth book of the *Laws*, which is an amazingly liberal statement, contrary to the now-prevailing view that Plato was very nasty and tried to introduce a kind of Inquisition into Athens. What he did was infinitely more liberal than the practice of Athens. Plato wanted to rewrite, as it were, the Athenian law regarding impiety in such a way that Socrates could be tolerated by the city of Athens, which he could not be according to the purport of the law of impiety as understood by the majority of the citizens. Did I answer your question?

Same Student: Yes.

Student: Why does Aristotle end the *Politics* with a discussion of education, and in particular of musical education?

LS: Well, as you know, in the eighth book of the *Politics* there are quite a few references to things which "we will discuss," and which we do not find discussed. Therefore, it seems likely that we do not have the end of the *Politics*, that it is lacking. God knows how many books it originally had. But that he discusses music as such does not surprise you, I suppose. Or does it?

Same Student: No, it doesn't surprise me that he discusses it, but what surprised me was the indefiniteness with which—

LS: Yes, that is I believe due to mere accident, that the mice nibbled away a considerable part of the *Politics*. Something like this must have happened. For a number of years, many years, Aristotle's writings were buried somewhere in a cellar in Asia Minor, for—I do not know how many—for quite a few decades, and then they were recovered. Aristotle had to run away from Athens, and whether this had anything to do with an accusation of impiety, or with this fact that he was connected with the Macedonian royal family, or with both, that we don't know. Aristotle is said to have said that he was fleeing from Athens lest Athens sin again against philosophy, i.e., as it had done before.

So. Well then, I wish you good luck.

[1] Deleted “I remind you again of the fact that you will have to be here for being tortured on Wednesday, at the same time. I will try to do that as gently as possible. Now the other point is, it is too late to announce it in the normal way: I made a change in my arrangements for next quarter. I will not give the seminar on Kant, but I will give a lecture course on Plato’s political philosophy, namely, an interpretation of one dialogue, the *Protagoras*.”
[2] Deleted “his.”
[3] Moved “‘moral virtues.’”
[4] Deleted “does a right.”
[5] Deleted “Now.”
[6] Deleted “in order.”
[7] Deleted “does he know, how.”
[8] Deleted “good.”
[9] Deleted “although.”
[10] Deleted “if you.”
[11] Deleted “what.”
[12] Deleted “of course, if we do not want to argue circularly, not.” Moved “if we do not want to argue circularly.”
[13] Deleted “is to understand.”
[14] Deleted “Moral virtue is.”
[15] Deleted “of the craftsman.”
[16] Changed from “this severe man Plato or either Socrates.”
[17] Deleted “it.”
[18] Deleted “means.”
[19] Deleted “work.”
[20] Deleted “and”
[21] Moved “that.”
[22] Deleted “There are.”
[23] Deleted “well.”
[24] Deleted “in a way.”
[25] Deleted “So the tension would be possible—I mean.”